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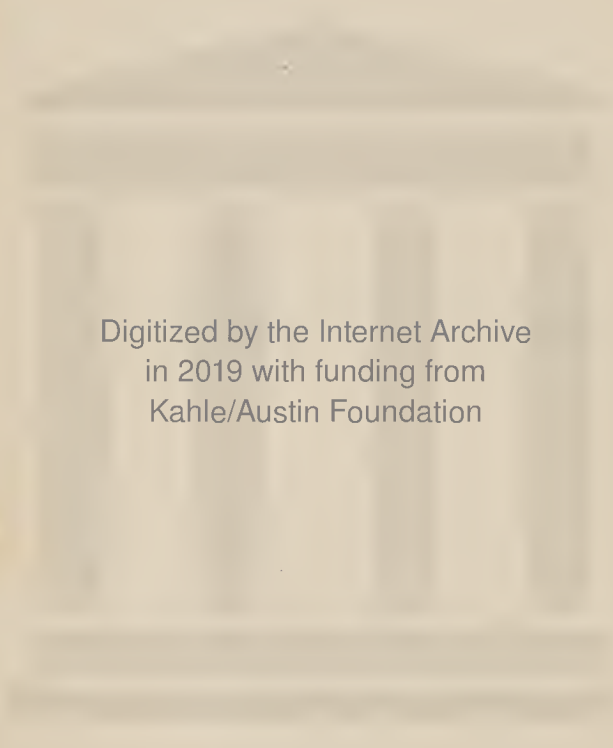
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SHELLEY AT OXFORD



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SHELLEY AT OXFORD

BY

THOMAS JEFFERSON HOGG

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

R. A. STREATFEILD

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INTRODUCTION

THOMAS JEFFERSON HOGG'S account of Shelley's career at Oxford first appeared in the form of a series of articles contributed to the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1832 and 1833. It was afterwards incorporated into his *Life of Shelley*, which was published in 1858. It is by common consent the most life-like portrait of the poet left by any of his contemporaries. "Hogg," said Trelawny, "has painted Shelley exactly as I knew him," and Mary Shelley, referring to Hogg's articles in her edition of Shelley's poems, bore witness to the fidelity with which her husband's character had been delineated. In later times everyone who has written about Shelley has drawn upon Hogg more or less freely, for he is practically the only authority upon Shelley's six months at Oxford. Yet, save in the extracts that appear in various biographies of the poet, this remarkable work is little known. Hogg's

fragmentary *Life of Shelley* was discredited by the plainly-expressed disapproval of the Shelley family and has never been reprinted. But the inaccuracies, to call them by no harsher term, that disfigure Hogg's later production do not affect the value of his earlier narrative, the substantial truth of which has never been impugned.

In 1832 the *New Monthly Magazine* was edited by the first Lord Lytton (at that time Edward Lytton Bulwer), to whom Hogg was introduced by Mrs Shelley. Hogg complained bitterly of the way in which his manuscript was treated. "To write articles in a magazine or a review," he observed in the Preface to his *Life of Shelley*, "is to walk in leading-strings. However, I submitted to the requirements and restraints of bibliopolar discipline, being content to speak of my young fellow-collegian, not exactly as I would, but as I might. I struggled at first, and feebly, for full liberty of speech, for a larger license of commendation and admiration, for entire freedom of the press without censorship." Bulwer, however, was inexorable, and it is owing, no doubt, to his salutary influence that the style of Hogg's account of Shelley's Oxford days is

so far superior to that of his later compilation. Hogg, in fact, tacitly admitted the value of Bulwer's emendations by reprinting the articles in question in his biography of Shelley word for word as they appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*, not in the form in which they originally left his pen.

Hogg himself was unquestionably a man of remarkable powers, though his present fame depends almost entirely upon his connection with Shelley. He was born in 1792, being the eldest son of John Hogg, a gentleman of old family and strong Tory opinions, who lived at Norton in the county of Durham. He was educated at Durham Grammar School, and entered University College, Oxford, in January 1810, a short time before Shelley. The account of his meeting with Shelley and of their intimacy down to the day of their expulsion is told in these pages.

On the strength of a remark of Trelawny's it has often been repeated that Hogg was a hard-headed man of the world who despised literature, "he thought it all nonsense and barely tolerated Shakespeare." Such is not the impression that a reader of these pages will retain, nor, I think, will he be inclined to echo

the opinion pronounced by another critic that Hogg regarded Shelley with a kind of amused disdain. On the contrary, it is plain that Hogg entertained for Shelley a sincere regard and admiration, and although himself a man of temperament directly opposed to that usually described as poetical, he was fully capable of appreciating the transcendent qualities of his friend's genius. There is little to add to the tale of Hogg's and Shelley's Oxford life as told in the following narrative, but further details as to their expulsion and the causes that led to it may be read in Professor Dowden's biography of the poet. After leaving Oxford, Hogg established himself at York, where he was articled to a conveyancer. There he was visited by Shelley and his young wife, Harriet Westbrook, in the course of their wanderings. For the latter Hogg conceived a violent passion, and during a brief absence of Shelley's assailed her with the most unworthy proposals, which she communicated to her husband on his return. After a painful interview Shelley forgave his friend, but left York with his wife abruptly for Keswick. Letters passed between Hogg and Shelley, Hogg at first demanding

Harriet's forgiveness under a threat of suicide and subsequently challenging Shelley to a duel. One of Shelley's replies, characteristically noble in sentiment, was printed by Hogg with cynical effrontery in his biography of the poet many years later as a "Fragment of a Novel." After these incidents there was no intercourse between the two until, in October 1812, the Shelleys arrived in London, whither Hogg had moved. From that time until Shelley's final departure from England in 1818 his connection with Hogg was resumed with much of its old intimacy.

In the year 1813 Hogg produced a work of fiction, *The Memoirs of Prince Alexy Haimatoff*, said to be translated from the original Latin MSS. under the immediate inspection of the Prince, by John Brown, Esq. The tale, which is for the most part told in stilted and extravagant language, can hardly be called amusing, but the discussions upon liberty which are a feature of it appear to be an echo of Shelley's conversation, and the hero himself may possibly be intended as a portrait of the poet. Certainly there are points in the Prince's description of himself which seem to be borrowed from

Shelley's physiognomy. "My complexion was a clear brown, rather inclining to yellow; my hair a deep and bright black; my eyes dark and strongly expressive of pride and anger, . . . my hands very small, and my head remarkable for its roundness and diminutive size." It would be interesting to trace in the other characters the portraits of various members of Hogg's circle. Mr Garnett identifies Gothon as Dr Lind, the Eton tutor whose sympathy and encouragement did much to alleviate the misery of Shelley's school-days. The fair Rosalie ought to be Harriet, and certain features of her character recall that unhappy damsel, but Rosalie disliked reading and thought Aristotle an "egregious trifler," whereas Harriet's taste in literature was of an extreme seriousness, and her partiality for reading works of a moral tendency to her companions in season and out of season was one of the least engaging features of her character.

Shelley reviewed *The Memoirs of Prince Alexy Haimatoff* in the *Critical Review* of December 1814, discussing the talents of the author in terms of glowing eulogy, though he found fault with his views on the subject of

sexual relations. Soon after his York experiences Hogg had entered at the Middle Temple and he was called to the Bar in 1817. He was not successful as a barrister, lacking the quickness and ready eloquence that command success. In or about the year 1826 Hogg married Jane, the widow of Edward Ellerker Williams, who had shared Shelley's fate three years previously. It is said that Mrs Williams insisted upon Hogg's preparing himself for the union, or perhaps we should rather say, proving his devotion, by a course of foreign travel. Hogg undertook the ordeal, voluntarily depriving himself of three things, each of which, to use his own words, "daily habit had taught me to consider a prime necessary of life—law, Greek, and an English newspaper." In 1827 he published the record of his tour in two volumes, entitled *Two Hundred and Nine Days ; or, The Journal of a Traveller on the Continent*, which, so far from illustrating the anguish of hope deferred, is a storehouse of shrewd and cynical observation.

In 1833 Hogg was appointed one of the Municipal Corporation Commissioners for England and Wales, and for many years he acted as Revising Barrister for Northumberland,

Berwick and the Northern Boroughs. About 1855 he was commissioned by the Shelley family to write the poet's biography and was furnished with the necessary papers. In 1858 he produced the two extant volumes, which proved so little satisfactory to Shelley's representatives that the materials for the continuation of his task were withdrawn and the work interrupted, never to be resumed. Hogg died in 1862. He was a man of varied culture ; in knowledge of Greek few scholars of his time surpassed him, and he was well read in German, French, Italian and Spanish. He was a fair botanist, and rejoiced to think that he was born upon the anniversary of the birth of Linnæus, for whose concise and simple style he professed a great admiration. Nevertheless it is chiefly as the friend and biographer of Shelley that he interests the present generation, and the re-publication of his account of the poet's Oxford experiences can scarcely fail to win him new admirers.

R. A. STREATFEILD

SHELLEY AT OXFORD

CHAPTER I

WHAT is the greatest disappointment in life? The question has often been asked. In a perfect life—that is to say, in a long course of various disappointments, when the collector has completed the entire set and series, which should he pronounce to be the greatest? What is the greatest disappointment of all? The question has often been asked, and it has received very different answers. Some have said matrimony; others, the accession of an inheritance that had long been anxiously anticipated; others, the attainment of honours; others, the deliverance from an ancient and intolerable nuisance, since a new and more grievous one speedily succeeded to the old. Many

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solutions have been proposed, and each has been ingeniously supported. At a very early age I had formed a splendid picture of the glories of our two Universities. My father took pleasure in describing his academical career. I listened to him with great delight, and many circumstances gave additional force to these first impressions. The clergy—and in the country they make one's principal guests—always spoke of these establishments with deep reverence, and of their academical days as the happiest of their lives.

When I went to school, my prejudices were strengthened; for the master noticed all deficiencies in learning as being unfit, and every remarkable proficiency as being fit, for the University. Such expressions marked the utmost limits of blame and of praise. Whenever any of the elder boys were translated to college—and several went thither from our school every year—the transmission was accompanied with a certain awe. I had always contemplated my own removal with the like feeling, and as the period approached,

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I anticipated it with a reverent impatience. The appointed day at last arrived, and I set out with a schoolfellow, about to enter the same career, and his father. The latter was a dutiful and a most grateful son of *alma mater*; and the conversation of this estimable man, during our long journey, fanned the flame of my young ardour. Such, indeed, had been the effect of his discourse for many years; and as he possessed a complete collection of the Oxford Almanacks, and it had been a great and frequent gratification to contemplate the engravings at the top of the annual sheets when I visited his quiet vicarage, I was already familiar with the aspect of the noble buildings that adorn that famous city. After travelling for several days we reached the last stage, and soon afterwards approached the point whence, I was told, we might discern the first glimpse of the metropolis of learning. I strained my eyes to catch a view of that land of promise, for which I had so eagerly longed. The summits of towers and spires and domes appeared

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afar and faintly ; then the prospect was obstructed. By degrees it opened upon us again, and we saw the tall trees that shaded the colleges. At three o'clock on a fine autumnal afternoon we entered the streets of Oxford. Although the weather was cold we had let down all the windows of our post-chaise, and I sat forward, devouring every object with greedy eyes. Members of the University, of different ages and ranks, were gliding through the quiet streets of the venerable city in academic costume.

We devoted two or three days to the careful examination of the various objects of interest that Oxford contains. The eye was gratified, for the external appearance of the University even surpassed the bright picture which my youthful imagination had painted. The outside was always admirable ; it was far otherwise with the inside. It is essential to the greatness of a disappointment that the previous expectation should have been great. Nothing could exceed my young anticipations — nothing could be more complete than their

overthrow. It would be impossible to describe my feelings without speaking harshly and irreverently of the venerable University. On this subject, then, I will only confess my disappointment, and discreetly be silent as to its causes. Whatever those causes, I grew, at least, and I own it cheerfully, soon pleased with Oxford, on the whole ; pleased with the beauty of the city and its gentle river, and the pleasantness of the surrounding country.

Although no great facilities were afforded to the student, there were the same opportunities of *solitary* study as in other places. All the irksome restraints of school were removed, and those of the University are few and trifling. Our fare was good, although not so good, perhaps, as it ought to have been, in return for the enormous cost ; and I liked the few companions with whom I most commonly mixed. I continued to lead a life of tranquil and studious and somewhat melancholy contentment until the long vacation, which I spent with my family ; and,

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when it expired, I returned to the University.

At the commencement of Michaelmas term—that is, at the end of October, in the year 1810, I happened one day to sit next to a freshman at dinner. It was his first appearance in hall. His figure was slight, and his aspect remarkably youthful, even at our table, where all were very young. He seemed thoughtful and absent. He ate little, and had no acquaintance with anyone. I know not how it was that we fell into conversation, for such familiarity was unusual, and, strange to say, much reserve prevailed in a society where there could not possibly be occasion for any. We have often endeavoured in vain to recollect in what manner our discourse began, and especially by what transition it passed to a subject sufficiently remote from all the associations we were able to trace. The stranger had expressed an enthusiastic admiration for poetical and imaginative works of the German school; I dissented from his criticisms. He upheld the originality

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of the German writings; I asserted their want of nature.

“What modern literature,” said he, “will you compare to theirs?”

I named the Italian. This roused all his impetuosity; and few, as I soon discovered, were more impetuous in argumentative conversation. So eager was our dispute that, when the servants came in to clear the tables, we were not aware that we had been left alone. I remarked that it was time to quit the hall, and I invited the stranger to finish the discussion at my rooms. He eagerly assented. He lost the thread of his discourse in the transit, and the whole of his enthusiasm in the cause of Germany; for, as soon as he arrived at my rooms, and whilst I was lighting the candles, he said calmly, and to my great surprise, that he was not qualified to maintain such a discussion, for he was alike ignorant of Italian and German, and had only read the works of the Germans in translations, and but little of Italian poetry, even at second hand. For my part, I confessed, with an equal in-

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genuousness, that I knew nothing of German, and but little of Italian ; that I had spoken only through others, and, like him, had hitherto seen by the glimmering light of translations.

It is upon such scanty data that young men reason ; upon such slender materials do they build up their opinions. It may be urged, however, that if they did not discourse freely with each other upon insufficient information — for such alone can be acquired in the pleasant morning of life, and until they educate themselves — they would be constrained to observe a perpetual silence, and to forego the numerous advantages that flow from frequent and liberal discussion.

I inquired of the vivacious stranger, as we sat over our wine and dessert, how long he had been at Oxford, and how he liked it? He answered my questions with a certain impatience, and, resuming the subject of our discussion, he remarked that, “ Whether the literature of Germany or of Italy be the more original, or in a purer and more

accurate taste, is of little importance, for polite letters are but vain trifling; the study of languages, not only of the modern tongues, but of Latin and Greek also, is merely the study of words and phrases, of the names of things; it matters not how they are called. It is surely far better to investigate things themselves." I inquired, a little bewildered, how this was to be effected? He answered, "Through the physical sciences, and especially through chemistry;" and, raising his voice, his face flushing as he spoke, he discoursed with a degree of animation, that far outshone his zeal in defence of the Germans, of chemistry and chemical analysis. Concerning that science, then so popular, I had merely a scanty and vulgar knowledge, gathered from elementary books, and the ordinary experiments of popular lecturers. I listened, therefore, in silence to his eloquent disquisition, interposing a few brief questions only, and at long intervals, as to the extent of his own studies and manipulations. As I felt,

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in truth, but a slight interest in the subject of his conversation, I had leisure to examine, and, I may add, to admire, the appearance of my very extraordinary guest. It was a sum of many contradictions. His figure was slight and fragile, and yet his bones and joints were large and strong. He was tall, but he stooped so much that he seemed of a low stature. His clothes were expensive, and made according to the most approved mode of the day, but they were tumbled, rumped, unbrushed. His gestures were abrupt, and sometimes violent, occasionally even awkward, yet more frequently gentle and graceful. His complexion was delicate and almost feminine, of the purest red and white ; yet he was tanned and freckled by exposure to the sun, having passed the autumn, as he said, in shooting. His features, his whole face, and particularly his head, were, in fact, unusually small ; yet the last *appeared* of a remarkable bulk, for his hair was long and bushy, and in fits of absence, and in the agonies (if I may use the

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word) of anxious thought, he often rubbed it fiercely with his hands, or passed his fingers quickly through his locks unconsciously, so that it was singularly wild and rough. In times when it was the mode to imitate stage-coachmen as closely as possible in costume, and when the hair was invariably cropped, like that of our soldiers, this eccentricity was very striking. His features were not symmetrical (the mouth, perhaps, excepted), yet was the effect of the whole extremely powerful. They breathed an animation, a fire, an enthusiasm, a vivid and preternatural intelligence, that I never met with in any other countenance. Nor was the moral expression less beautiful than the intellectual ; for there was a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, and especially (though this will surprise many) that air of profound religious veneration that characterises the best works, and chiefly the frescoes (and into these they infused their whole souls) of the great masters of Florence and of Rome. I recognised the very

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peculiar expression in these wonderful productions long afterwards, and with a satisfaction mingled with much sorrow, for it was after the decease of him in whose countenance I had first observed it. I admired the enthusiasm of my new acquaintance, his ardour in the cause of science and his thirst for knowledge. I seemed to have found in him all those intellectual qualities which I had vainly expected to meet with in a University. But there was one physical blemish that threatened to neutralise all his excellence. "This is a fine, clever fellow!" I said to myself, "but I can never bear his society; I shall never be able to endure his voice; it would kill me. What a pity it is!" I am very sensible of imperfections, and especially of painful sounds, and the voice of the stranger was excruciating. It was intolerably shrill, harsh and discordant; of the most cruel intension. It was perpetual, and without any remission; it excoriated the ears. He continued to discourse on chemistry, sometimes sitting, sometimes standing

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before the fire, and sometimes pacing about the room ; and when one of the innumerable clocks, that speak in various notes during the day and the night at Oxford, proclaimed a quarter to seven, he said suddenly that he must go to a lecture on mineralogy, and declared enthusiastically that he expected to derive much pleasure and instruction from it. I am ashamed to own that the cruel voice made me hesitate for a moment ; but it was impossible to omit so indispensable a civility — I invited him to return to tea. He gladly assented, promised that he would not be absent long, snatched his hat, hurried out of the room, and I heard his footsteps, as he ran through the silent quadrangle and afterwards along High Street.

An hour soon elapsed, whilst the table was cleared and the tea was made, and I again heard the footsteps of one running quickly. My guest suddenly burst into the room, threw down his cap, and as he stood shivering and chafing his hands over the fire, he declared how much

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he had been disappointed in the lecture. Few persons attended ; it was dull and languid, and he was resolved never to go to another.

“ I went away, indeed,” he added, with an arch look, and in a shrill whisper, coming close to me as he spoke—“ I went away, indeed, before the lecture was finished. I stole away, for it was so stupid, and I was so cold that my teeth chattered. The Professor saw me, and appeared to be displeased. I thought I could have got out without being observed, but I struck my knee against a bench and made a noise, and he looked at me. I am determined that he shall never see me again.”

“ What did the man talk about ? ”

“ About stones ! about stones ! ” he answered, with a downcast look and in a melancholy tone, as if about to say something excessively profound. “ About stones ! stones, stones, stones ! —nothing but stones ! —and so drily. It was wonderfully tiresome, and stones are not interesting things in themselves ! ”

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We took tea, and soon afterwards had supper, as was usual. He discoursed after supper with as much warmth as before of the wonders of chemistry; of the encouragement that Napoleon afforded to that most important science; of the French chemists and their glorious discoveries, and of the happiness of visiting Paris and sharing in their fame and their experiments. The voice, however, seemed to me more cruel than ever. He spoke, likewise, of his own labours and of his apparatus, and starting up suddenly after supper, he proposed that I should go instantly with him to see the galvanic trough. I looked at my watch, and observed that it was too late; that the fire would be out, and the night was cold. He resumed his seat, saying that I might come on the morrow early, to breakfast, immediately after chapel. He continued to declaim in his rapturous strain, asserting that chemistry was, in truth, the only science that deserved to be studied. I suggested doubts. I ventured to question the pre-eminence of the science, and even

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to hesitate in admitting its utility. He described in glowing language some discoveries that had lately been made ; but the enthusiastic chemist candidly allowed that they were rather brilliant than useful, asserting, however, that they would soon be applied to purposes of solid advantage.

“Is not the time of by far the larger proportion of the human species,” he inquired, with his fervid manner and in his piercing tones, “wholly consumed in severe labour? And is not this devotion of our race—of the whole of our race, I may say (for those who, like ourselves, are indulged with an exemption from the hard lot are so few in comparison with the rest, that they scarcely deserve to be taken into account)—absolutely necessary to procure subsistence, so that men have no leisure for recreation or the high improvement of the mind? Yet this incessant toil is still inadequate to procure an abundant supply of the common necessities of life. Some are doomed actually to want them, and many are compelled to be content with

an insufficient provision. We know little of the peculiar nature of those substances which are proper for the nourishment of animals; we are ignorant of the qualities that make them fit for this end. Analysis has advanced so rapidly of late that we may confidently anticipate that we shall soon discover wherein their aptitude really consists; having ascertained the cause, we shall next be able to command it, and to produce at our pleasure the desired effects. It is easy, even in our present state of ignorance, to reduce our ordinary food to carbon, or to lime; a moderate advancement in chemical science will speedily enable us, we may hope, to create, with equal facility, food from substances that appear at present to be as ill adapted to sustain us. What is the cause of the remarkable fertility of some lands, and of the hopeless sterility of others? A spadeful of the most productive soil does not to the eye differ much from the same quantity taken from the most barren. The real difference is probably very slight; by

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chemical agency the philosopher may work a total change, and may transmute an unfruitful region into a land of exuberant plenty. Water, like the atmospheric air, is compounded of certain gases ; in the progress of scientific discovery a simple and sure method of manufacturing the useful fluid, in every situation and in any quantity, may be detected. The arid deserts of Africa may then be refreshed by a copious supply and may be transformed at once into rich meadows and vast fields of maize and rice. The generation of heat is a mystery, but enough of the theory of caloric has already been developed to induce us to acquiesce in the notion that it will hereafter, and perhaps at no very distant period, be possible to produce heat at will, and to warm the most ungenial climates as readily as we now raise the temperature of our apartments to whatever degree we may deem agreeable or salutary. If, however, it be too much to anticipate that we shall ever become sufficiently skilful to command such a prodigious supply of

heat, we may expect, without the fear of disappointment, soon to understand its nature and the causes of combustion, so far at least, as to provide ourselves cheaply with a fund of heat that will supersede our costly and inconvenient fuel, and will suffice to warm our habitations, for culinary purposes and for the various demands of the mechanical arts. We could not determine without actual experiment whether an unknown substance were combustible; when we shall have thoroughly investigated the properties of fire, it may be that we shall be qualified to communicate to clay, to stones, and to water itself, a chemical recomposition that will render them as inflammable as wood, coals and oil; for the difference of structure is minute and invisible, and the power of feeding flame may, perhaps, be easily added to any substance, or taken away from it. What a comfort would it be to the poor at all times, and especially at this season, if we were capable of solving this problem alone, if we could furnish them with a competent supply of heat!

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These speculations may appear wild, and it may seem improbable that they will ever be realised to persons who have not extended their views of what is practicable by closely watching science in its course onward; but there are many mysterious powers, many irresistible agents with the existence and with some of the phenomena of which all are acquainted. What a mighty instrument would electricity be in the hands of him who knew how to wield it, in what manner to direct its omnipotent energies, and we may command an indefinite quantity of the fluid. By means of electrical kites we may draw down the lightning from heaven! What a terrible organ would the supernal shock prove, if we were able to guide it; how many of the secrets of nature would such a stupendous force unlock. The galvanic battery is a new engine; it has been used hitherto to an insignificant extent, yet has it wrought wonders already; what will not an extraordinary combination of troughs, of colossal magnitude, a well-arranged system of hundreds of

metallic plates, effect? The balloon has not yet received the perfection of which it is surely capable; the art of navigating the air is in its first and most helpless infancy; the aërial mariner still swims on bladders, and has not mounted even the rude raft; if we weigh this invention, curious as it is, with some of the subjects I have mentioned, it will seem trifling, no doubt—a mere toy, a feather in comparison with the splendid anticipations of the philosophical chemist; yet it ought not altogether to be condemned. It promises prodigious facilities for locomotion, and will enable us to traverse vast tracts with ease and rapidity, and to explore unknown countries without difficulty. Why are we still so ignorant of the interior of Africa?—why do we not despatch intrepid aëronauts to cross it in every direction, and to survey the whole peninsula in a few weeks? The shadow of the first balloon, which a vertical sun would project precisely underneath it, as it glided silently over that hitherto unhappy country, would virtually

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emancipate every slave, and would annihilate slavery for ever."

With such fervour did the slender, beardless stranger speculate concerning the march of physical science; his speculations were as wild as the experience of twenty-one years has shown them to be; but the zealous earnestness for the augmentation of knowledge, and the glowing philanthropy and boundless benevolence that marked them, and beamed forth in the whole deportment of that extraordinary boy, are not less astonishing than they would have been if the whole of his glorious anticipations had been prophetic; for these high qualities at least I have never found a parallel. When he had ceased to predict the coming honours of chemistry, and to promise the rich harvest of benefits it was soon to yield, I suggested that, although its results were splendid, yet for those who could not hope to make discoveries themselves, it did not afford so valuable a course of mental discipline as the moral sciences; moreover, that, if

chemists asserted that their science alone deserved to be cultivated, the mathematicians made the same assertion, and with equal confidence, respecting their studies; but that I was not sufficiently advanced myself in mathematics to be able to judge how far it was well founded. He declared that he knew nothing of mathematics, and treated the notion of their paramount importance with contempt.

“What do you say of metaphysics?” I continued; “is that science, too, the study of words only?”

“Ay, metaphysics,” he said, in a solemn tone, and with a mysterious air, “that is a noble study indeed! If it were possible to make any discoveries there, they would be more valuable than anything the chemists have done, or could do; they would disclose the analysis of mind, and not of mere matter!” Then, rising from his chair, he paced slowly about the room, with prodigious strides, and discoursed of souls with still greater animation and vehemence than he had displayed in

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treating of gases—of a future state—and especially of a former state—of pre-existence, obscured for a time through the suspension of consciousness—of personal identity, and also of ethical philosophy, in a deep and earnest tone of elevated morality, until he suddenly remarked that the fire was nearly out, and the candles were glimmering in their sockets, when he hastily apologised for remaining so long. I promised to visit the chemist in his laboratory, the alchemist in his study, the wizard in his cave, not at breakfast on that day, for it was already one, but in twelve hours—one hour after noon—and to hear some of the secrets of nature; and for that purpose he told me his name, and described the situation of his rooms. I lighted him downstairs as well as I could with the stump of a candle which had dissolved itself into a lump, and I soon heard him running through the quiet quadrangle in the still night. That sound became afterwards so familiar to my ear, that I still seem to hear Shelley's hasty steps.

CHAPTER II

I TRUST, or I should perhaps rather say I hope, that I was as much struck by the conversation, the aspect, and the deportment of my new acquaintance, as entirely convinced of the value of the acquisition I had just made, and as deeply impressed with surprise and admiration as became a young student not insensible of excellence, to whom a character so extraordinary, and indeed almost preternatural, had been suddenly unfolded. During his animated and eloquent discourses I felt a due reverence for his zeal and talent, but the human mind is capable of a certain amount of attention only. I had listened and discussed for seven or eight hours, and my spirits were totally exhausted. I went to bed as soon as Shelley had quitted my rooms, and fell

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instantly into a profound sleep ; and I shook off with a painful effort, at the accustomed signal, the complete oblivion which then appeared to have been but momentary. Many of the wholesome usages of antiquity had ceased at Oxford ; that of early rising, however, still lingered.

As soon as I got up, I applied myself sedulously to my academical duties and my accustomed studies. The power of habitual occupation is great and engrossing, and it is possible that my mind had not yet fully recovered from the agreeable fatigue of the preceding evening, for I had entirely forgotten my engagement, nor did the thought of my young guest once cross my fancy. It was strange that a person so remarkable and attractive should have thus disappeared for several hours from my memory ; but such in truth was the fact, although I am unable to account for it in a satisfactory manner.

At one o'clock I put away my books and papers, and prepared myself for my daily walk ; the weather was frosty,

with fog, and whilst I lingered over the fire with that reluctance to venture forth into the cold air common to those who have chilled themselves by protracted sedentary pursuits, the recollection of the scenes of yesterday flashed suddenly and vividly across my mind, and I quickly repaired to a spot that I may perhaps venture to predict many of our posterity will hereafter reverently visit—to the rooms in the corner next the hall of the principal quadrangle of University College. They are on the first floor, and on the right of the entrance, but by reason of the turn in the stairs, when you reach them they will be upon your left hand. I remember the direction given at parting, and I soon found the door. It stood ajar. I tapped gently, and the discordant voice cried shrilly,—

“Come in!”

It was now nearly two. I began to apologise for my delay, but I was interrupted by a loud exclamation of surprise.

“What! is it one? I had no notion

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it was so late. I thought it was about ten or eleven."

"It is on the stroke of two, sir," said the scout, who was engaged in the vain attempt of setting the apartment in order.

"Of two!" Shelley cried with increased wonder, and presently the clock struck, and the servant noticed it, retired and shut the door.

I perceived at once that the young chemist took no note of time. He measured duration, not by minutes and hours, like watchmakers and their customers, but by the successive trains of ideas and sensations; consequently, if there was a virtue of which he was utterly incapable, it was that homely but pleasing and useful one—punctuality. He could not tear himself from his incessant abstractions to observe at intervals the growth and decline of the day; nor was he ever able to set apart even a small portion of his mental powers for a duty so simple as that of watching the course of the pointers on the dial.

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I found him cowering over the fire, his chair planted in the middle of the rug, and his feet resting upon the fender ; his whole appearance was dejected. His astonishment at the unexpected lapse of time roused him. As soon as the hour of the day was ascertained he welcomed me, and seizing one of my arms with both his hands, he shook it with some force, and very cordially expressed his satisfaction at my visit. Then, resuming his seat and his former posture, he gazed fixedly at the fire, and his limbs trembled and his teeth chattered with cold. I cleared the fireplace with the poker and stirred the fire, and when it blazed up, he drew back, and, looking askance towards the door, he exclaimed with a deep sigh,—

“Thank God, that fellow is gone at last !”

The assiduity of the scout had annoyed him, and he presently added,—

“If you had not come, he would have stayed until he had put everything in my rooms into some place where I should never have found it again !”

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He then complained of his health, and said that he was very unwell ; but he did not appear to be affected by any disorder more serious than a slight aguish cold. I remarked the same contradiction in his rooms which I had already observed in his person and dress. They had just been papered and painted ; the carpet, curtains, and furniture were quite new, and had not passed through several academical generations, after the established custom of transferring the whole of the movables to the successor on payments of thirds, that is, of two-thirds of the price last given. The general air of freshness was greatly obscured, however, by the indescribable confusion in which the various objects were mixed. Notwithstanding the unwelcome exertions of the officious scout, scarcely a single article was in its proper position.

Books, boots, papers, shoes, philosophical instruments, clothes, pistols, linen, crockery, ammunition and phials innumerable, with money, stockings, prints, crucibles, bags and boxes were

scattered on the floor and in every place, as if the young chemist, in order to analyse the mystery of creation, had endeavoured first to re-construct the primeval chaos. The tables, and especially the carpet, were already stained with large spots of various hues, which frequently proclaimed the agency of fire. An electrical machine, an air-pump, the galvanic trough, a solar microscope and large glass jars and receivers, were conspicuous amidst the mass of matter. Upon the table by his side were some books lying open, several letters, a bundle of new pens and a bottle of japan ink that served as an inkstand ; a piece of deal, lately part of the lid of a box, with many chips, and a handsome razor that had been used as a knife. There were bottles of soda water, sugar, pieces of lemon, and the traces of an effervescent beverage. Two piles of books supported the tongs, and these upheld a small glass retort above an argand lamp. I had not been seated many minutes before the liquor in the vessel boiled over, adding fresh

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stains to the table, and rising in fumes with a most disagreeable odour. Shelley snatched the glass quickly, and dashing it in pieces among the ashes under the grate, increased the unpleasant and penetrating effluvium.

He then proceeded with much eagerness and enthusiasm to show me the various instruments, especially the electrical apparatus, turning round the handle very rapidly, so that the fierce, crackling sparks flew forth; and presently, standing upon the stool with glass feet, he begged me to work the machine until he was filled with the fluid, so that his long wild locks bristled and stood on end. Afterwards he charged a powerful battery of several large jars; labouring with vast energy, and discoursing with increasing vehemence of the marvellous powers of electricity, of thunder and lightning; describing an electrical kite that he had made at home, and projecting another and an enormous one, or rather a combination of many kites, that would draw down from the sky an

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immense volume of electricity, the whole ammunition of a mighty thunder-storm ; and this being directed to some point would there produce the most stupendous results.

In these exhibitions and in such conversation the time passed away rapidly, and the hour of dinner approached. Having pricked *æger* that day, or, in other words, having caused his name to be entered as an invalid, he was not required or permitted to dine in hall, or to appear in public within the college or without the walls, until a night's rest should have restored the sick man to health.

He requested me to spend the evening at his rooms ; I consented, nor did I fail to attend immediately after dinner. We conversed until a late hour on miscellaneous topics. I remember that he spoke frequently of poetry, and that there was the same animation, the same glowing zeal, which had characterised his former discourses, and was so opposite to the listless languor, the monstrous indifference, if

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not the absolute antipathy to learning, that so strangely darkened the collegiate atmosphere. It would seem, indeed, to one who rightly considered the final cause of the institution of a university, that all the rewards, all the honours the most opulent foundation could accumulate, would be inadequate to remunerate an individual, whose thirst for knowledge was so intense, and his activity in the pursuit of it so wonderful and so unwearied. I participated in his enthusiasm, and soon forgot the shrill and unmusical voice that had at first seemed intolerable to my ear.

He was, indeed, a whole university in himself to me, in respect of the stimulus and incitement which his example afforded to my love of study, and he amply atoned for the disappointment I had felt on my arrival at Oxford. In one respect alone could I pretend to resemble him—in an ardent desire to gain knowledge, and, as our tastes were the same in many particulars, we immediately became, through sympathy, most intimate and altogether inseparable

companions. We almost invariably passed the afternoon and evening together ; at first, alternately at our respective rooms, through a certain punctiliousness, but afterwards, when we became more familiar, most frequently by far at his. Sometimes one or two good and harmless men of our acquaintance were present, but we were usually alone. His rooms were preferred to mine, because there his philosophical apparatus was at hand ; and at that period he was not perfectly satisfied with the condition and circumstances of his existence, unless he was able to start from his seat at any moment, and seizing the air-pump, some magnets, the electrical machine, or the bottles containing those noxious and nauseous fluids wherewith he incessantly besmeared and disfigured himself and his goods, to ascertain by actual experiment the value of some new idea that rushed into his brain. He spent much time in working by fits and starts and in an irregular manner with his instruments, and especially consumed his hours and

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his money in the assiduous cultivation of chemistry.

We have heard that one of the most distinguished of modern discoverers was abrupt, hasty, and to appearance disorderly, in the conduct of his manipulations. The variety of the habits of great men is indeed infinite. It is impossible, therefore, to decide peremptorily as to the capabilities of individuals from their course of proceeding, yet it certainly seemed highly improbable that Shelley was qualified to succeed in a science wherein a scrupulous minuteness and a mechanical accuracy are indispensable. His chemical operations seemed to an unskilful observer to promise nothing but disasters. His hands, his clothes, his books and his furniture were stained and corroded by mineral acids. More than one hole in the carpet could elucidate the ultimate phenomenon of combustion; especially a formidable aperture in the middle of the room, where the floor also had been burnt by the spontaneous ignition, caused by mixing

ether with some other fluid in a crucible ; and the honourable wound was speedily enlarged by rents, for the philosopher, as he hastily crossed the room in pursuit of truth, was frequently caught in it by the foot. Many times a day, but always in vain, would the sedulous scout say, pointing to the scorched boards with a significant look,—

“ Would it not be better, sir, for us to get this place mended ? ”

It seemed but too probable that in the rash ardour of experiment he would some day set the college on fire, or that he would blind, maim or kill himself by the explosion of combustibles. It was still more likely, indeed, that he would poison himself, for plates and glasses and every part of his tea equipage were used indiscriminately with crucibles, retorts, and recipients, to contain the most deleterious ingredients. To his infinite diversion I used always to examine every drinking vessel narrowly, and often to rinse it carefully, after that evening when we were taking tea by firelight, and my attention being attracted by the sound

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of something in the cup into which I was about to pour tea, I was induced to look into it. I found a seven-shilling piece partly dissolved by the *aqua regia* in which it was immersed. Although he laughed at my caution, he used to speak with horror of the consequences of having inadvertently swallowed, through a similar accident, some mineral poison—I think arsenic—at Eton, which he declared had not only seriously injured his health, but that he feared he should never entirely recover from the shock it had inflicted on his constitution. It seemed improbable, notwithstanding his positive assertions, that his lively fancy exaggerated the recollection of the unpleasant and permanent taste, of the sickness and disorder of the stomach, which might arise from taking a minute portion of some poisonous substance by the like chance, for there was no vestige of a more serious and lasting injury in his youthful and healthy, although somewhat delicate aspect.

I knew little of the physical sciences, and I felt, therefore, but a slight degree

of interest in them. I looked upon his philosophical apparatus merely as toys and playthings, like a chess-board or a billiard table. Through lack of sympathy, his zeal, which was at first so ardent, gradually cooled ; and he applied himself to these pursuits, after a short time, less frequently and with less earnestness. The true value of them was often the subject of animated discussion ; and I remember one evening at my own rooms, when we had sought refuge against the intense cold in the little inner apartment, or study, I referred, in the course of our debate, to a passage in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, where Socrates speaks in disparagement of Physics. He read it several times very attentively, and more than once aloud, slowly and with emphasis, and it appeared to make a strong impression on him.

Notwithstanding our difference of opinion as to the importance of chemistry and on some other questions, our intimacy rapidly increased, and we soon formed the habit of passing the

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greater part of our time together ; nor did this constant intercourse interfere with my usual studies. I never visited his rooms until one o'clock, by which hour, as I rose very early, I had not only attended the college lectures, but had read in private for several hours. I was enabled, moreover, to continue my studies afterwards in the evening, in consequence of a very remarkable peculiarity. My young and energetic friend was then overcome by extreme drowsiness, which speedily and completely vanquished him ; he would sleep from two to four hours, often so soundly that his slumbers resembled a deep lethargy ; he lay occasionally upon the sofa, but more commonly stretched upon the rug before a large fire, like a cat ; and his little round head was exposed to such a fierce heat, that I used to wonder how he was able to bear it. Sometimes I have interposed some shelter, but rarely with any permanent effect ; for the sleeper usually contrived to turn himself and to roll again into

the spot where the fire glowed the brightest. His torpor was generally profound, but he would sometimes discourse incoherently for a long while in his sleep. At six he would suddenly compose himself, even in the midst of a most animated narrative or of earnest discussion ; and he would lie buried in entire forgetfulness, in a sweet and mighty oblivion, until ten, when he would suddenly start up, and rubbing his eyes with great violence, and passing his fingers swiftly through his long hair, would enter at once into a vehement argument, or begin to recite verses, either of his own composition or from the works of others, with a rapidity and an energy that were often quite painful. During the period of his occultation I took tea, and read or wrote without interruption. He would sometimes sleep for a shorter time, for about two hours, postponing for the like period the commencement of his retreat to the rug, and rising with tolerable punctuality at ten ; and sometimes, although rarely, he was

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able entirely to forego the accustomed refreshment.

We did not consume the whole of our time, when he was awake, in conversation; we often read apart, and more frequently together. Our joint studies were occasionally interrupted by long discussions — nevertheless, I could enumerate many works, and several of them are extensive and important, which we perused completely and very carefully in this manner. At ten, when he awoke, he was always ready for his supper, which he took with a peculiar relish. After that social meal his mind was clear and penetrating, and his discourse eminently brilliant. He was unwilling to separate, but when the college clock struck two, I used to rise and retire to my room. Our conversations were sometimes considerably prolonged, but they seldom terminated before that chilly hour of the early morning; nor did I feel any inconvenience from thus reducing the period of rest to scarcely five hours.

A disquisition on some difficult question in the open air was not less agreeable to him than by the fireside ; if the weather was fine, or rather not altogether intolerable, we used to sally forth, when we met at one.

I have already pointed out several contradictions in his appearance and character. His ordinary preparation for a rural walk formed a very remarkable contrast with his mild aspect and pacific habits. He furnished himself with a pair of duelling pistols and a good store of powder and ball, and when he came to a solitary spot, he pinned a card, or fixed some other mark upon a tree or a bank, and amused himself by firing at it : he was a pretty good shot, and was much delighted at his success. He often urged me to try my hand and eye, assuring me that I was not aware of the pleasure of a good hit. One day, when he was peculiarly pressing, I took up a pistol and asked him what I should aim at ? And observing a slab of wood, about as big as a hearthrug, standing against a wall, I named it as being a

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proper object. He said that it was much too far off; it was better to wait until we came nearer. But I answered—"I may as well fire here as anywhere," and instantly discharged my pistol. To my infinite surprise the ball struck the elm target most accurately in the very centre. Shelley was delighted. He ran to the board, placed his chin close to it, gazed at the hole where the bullet was lodged, examined it attentively on all sides many times, and more than once measured the distance to the spot where I had stood.

I never knew anyone so prone to admire as he was, in whom the principle of veneration was so strong. He extolled my skill, urged me repeatedly to display it again, and begged that I would give him instructions in an art in which I so much excelled. I suffered him to enjoy his wonder for a few days, and then I told him, and with difficulty persuaded him, that my success was purely accidental; for I had seldom fired a pistol before, and never with ball, but with

shot only, as a schoolboy, in clandestine and bloodless expeditions against black-birds and yellowhammers.

The duelling pistols were a most discordant interruption of the repose of a quiet country walk ; besides, he handled them with such inconceivable carelessness, that I had perpetually reason to apprehend that, as a trifling episode in the grand and heroic work of drilling a hole through the back of a card or the front of one of his father's franks, he would shoot himself, or me, or both of us. How often have I lamented that Nature, which so rarely bestows upon the world a creature endowed with such marvellous talents, ungraciously rendered the gift less precious by implanting a fatal taste for perilous recreations, and a thoughtlessness in the pursuit of them, that often caused his existence from one day to another to seem in itself miraculous. I opposed the practice of walking armed, and I at last succeeded in inducing him to leave the pistols at home, and to forbear the use of them. I prevailed, I

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believe, not so much by argument or persuasion, as by secretly abstracting, when he equipped himself for the field, and it was not difficult with him, the powder-flask, the flints or some other indispensable article. One day, I remember, he was grievously discomposed and seriously offended to find, on producing his pistols, after descending rapidly into a quarry, where he proposed to take a few shots, that not only had the flints been removed, but the screws and the bits of steel at the top of the cocks which hold the flints were also wanting. He determined to return to college for them—I accompanied him. I tempted him, however, by the way, to try to define anger, and to discuss the nature of that affection of the mind, to which, as the discussion waxed warm, he grew exceedingly hostile in theory, and could not be brought to admit that it could possibly be excusable in any case. In the course of conversation, moreover, he suffered himself to be insensibly turned away from his original path and purpose. I

have heard that, some years after he left Oxford, he resumed the practice of pistol-shooting, and attained to a very unusual degree of skill in an accomplishment so entirely incongruous with his nature.

Of rural excursions he was at all times fond. He loved to walk in the woods, to stroll on the banks of the Thames, but especially to wander about Shotover Hill. There was a pond at the foot of the hill, before ascending it and on the left of the road ; it was formed by the water which had filled an old quarry. Whenever he was permitted to shape his course as he would, he proceeded to the edge of this pool, although the scene had no other attractions than a certain wildness and barrenness. Here he would linger until dusk, gazing in silence on the water, repeating verses aloud, or earnestly discussing themes that had no connection with surrounding objects. Sometimes he would raise a stone as large as he could lift, deliberately throw it into the water as far as his strength enabled him, then

he would loudly exult at the splash, and would quietly watch the decreasing agitation, until the last faint ring and almost imperceptible ripple disappeared on the still surface. "Such are the effects of an impulse on the air," he would say; and he complained of our ignorance of the theory of sound—that the subject was obscure and mysterious, and many of the phenomena were contradictory and inexplicable. He asserted that the science of acoustics ought to be cultivated, and that by well-devised experiments valuable discoveries would undoubtedly be made, and he related many remarkable stories connected with the subject that he had heard or read. Sometimes he would busy himself in splitting slaty stones, in selecting thin and flat pieces and in giving them a round form, and when he had collected a sufficient number, he would gravely make ducks and drakes with them, counting, with the utmost glee, the number of bounds as they flew along, skimming the surface of the pond. He was a devoted worshipper of the

water-nymphs, for, whenever he found a pool, or even a small puddle, he would loiter near it, and it was no easy task to get him to quit it. He had not yet learned that art from which he afterwards derived so much pleasure—the construction of paper boats. He twisted a morsel of paper into a form that a lively fancy might consider a likeness of a boat, and, committing it to the water, he anxiously watched the fortunes of the frail bark, which, if it was not soon swamped by the faint winds and miniature waves, gradually imbibed water through its porous sides, and sank. Sometimes, however, the fairy vessel performed its little voyage, and reached the opposite shore of the puny ocean in safety. It is astonishing with what keen delight he engaged in this singular pursuit. It was not easy for an uninitiated spectator to bear with tolerable patience the vast delay on the brink of a wretched pond upon a bleak common and in the face of a cutting north-east wind, on returning to dinner from a long walk at sunset on a cold winter's

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day ; nor was it easy to be so harsh as to interfere with a harmless gratification that was evidently exquisite. It was not easy, at least, to induce the ship-builder to desist from launching his tiny fleets, so long as any timber remained in the dock-yard. I prevailed once and once only. It was one of those bitter Sundays that commonly receive the new year ; the sun had set, and it had almost begun to snow. I had exhorted him long in vain, with the eloquence of a frozen and famished man, to proceed. At last I said in despair—alluding to his never-ending creations, for a paper navy that was to be set afloat simultaneously lay at his feet, and he was busily constructing more, with blue and swollen hands — “Shelley, there is no use in talking to you ; you are the Demiurgus of Plato !” He instantly caught up the whole flotilla, and, bounding homeward with mighty strides, laughed aloud—laughed like a giant as he used to say. So long as his paper lasted, he remained riveted to the spot, fascinated by this peculiar amuse-

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ment. All waste paper was rapidly consumed, then the covers of letters ; next, letters of little value ; the most precious contributions of the most esteemed correspondent, although eyed wistfully many times and often returned to the pocket, were sure to be sent at last in pursuit of the former squadrons. Of the portable volumes which were the companions of his rambles, and he seldom went out without a book, the fly-leaves were commonly wanting — he had applied them as our ancestor Noah applied Gopher wood. But learning was so sacred in his eyes, that he never trespassed farther upon the integrity of the copy ; the work itself was always respected. It has been said that he once found himself on the north bank of the Serpentine river without the materials for indulging those inclinations which the sight of water invariably inspired, for he had exhausted his supplies on the round pond in Kensington Gardens. Not a single scrap of paper could be found, save only a bank-post bill for fifty pounds. He hesitated

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long, but yielded at last. He twisted it into a boat with the extreme refinement of his skill, and committed it with the utmost dexterity to fortune, watching its progress, if possible, with a still more intense anxiety than usual. Fortune often favours those who frankly and fully trust her; the north-east wind gently wafted the costly skiff to the south bank, where, during the latter part of the voyage, the venturous owner had waited its arrival with patient solicitude. The story, of course, is a mythic fable, but it aptly portrays the dominion of a singular and most unaccountable passion over the mind of an enthusiast.

But to return to Oxford. Shelley disliked exceedingly all college meetings, and especially one which was the most popular with others—the public dinner in the hall. He used often to absent himself, and he was greatly delighted whenever I agreed to partake with him in a slight luncheon at one, to take a long walk into the country and to return after dark to tea and

supper in his rooms. On one of these expeditions we wandered farther than usual without regarding the distance or the lapse of time; but we had no difficulty in finding our way home, for the night was clear and frosty, and the moon at the full; and most glorious was the spectacle as we approached the City of Colleges, and passed through the silent streets. It was near ten when we entered our college; not only was it too late for tea, but supper was ready, the cloth laid, and the table spread. A large dish of scalloped oysters had been set within the fender to be kept hot for the famished wanderers.

Among the innumerable contradictions in the character and deportment of the youthful poet was a strange mixture of singular grace, which manifested itself in his actions and gestures, with an occasional awkwardness almost as remarkable. As soon as we entered the room, he placed his chair as usual directly in front of the fire, and eagerly pressed forward to warm himself, for the frost was severe and he was very

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sensible of cold. Whilst cowering over the fire and rubbing his hands, he abruptly set both his feet at once upon the edge of the fender; it immediately flew up, threw under the grate the dish, which was broken into two pieces, and the whole of the delicious mess was mingled with the cinders and ashes, that had accumulated for several hours. It was impossible that a hungry and frozen pedestrian should restrain a strong expression of indignation, or that he should forbear, notwithstanding the exasperation of cold and hunger, from smiling and forgiving the accident at seeing the whimsical air and aspect of the offender, as he held up with the shovel the long-anticipated food, deformed by ashes, coals and cinders, with a ludicrous expression of exaggerated surprise, disappointment, and contrition.

It would be easy to fill many volumes with reminiscences characteristic of my young friend, and of these the most trifling would perhaps best illustrate his innumerable peculiarities.

With the discerning, trifles, although they are accounted such, have their value. A familiarity with the daily habits of Shelley, and the knowledge of his demeanour in private, will greatly facilitate, and they are perhaps even essential to, the full comprehension of his views and opinions. Traits that unfold an infantine simplicity—the genuine simplicity of true genius—will be slighted by those who are ignorant of the qualities that constitute greatness of soul. The philosophical observer knows well that, to have shown a mind to be original and perfectly natural, is no inconsiderable step in demonstrating that it is also great.

Our supper had disappeared under the grate, but we were able to silence the importunity of hunger. As the supply of cheese was scanty, Shelley pretended, in order to atone for his carelessness, that he never ate it; but I refused to take more than my share, and, notwithstanding his reiterated declarations that it was offensive to his palate and hurtful to his stomach, as I was

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inexorable, he devoured the remainder, greedily swallowing, not merely the cheese, but the rind also, after scraping it cursorily, and with a certain tenderness. A tankard of the stout brown ale of our college aided us greatly in removing the sense of cold, and in supplying the deficiency of food, so that we turned our chairs towards the fire, and began to brew our negus as cheerfully as if the bounty of the hospitable gods had not been intercepted.

We reposed ourselves after the fatigue of an unusually long walk, and silence was broken by short remarks only, and at considerable intervals, respecting the beauty of moonlight scenes, and especially of that we had just enjoyed. The serenity and clearness of the night exceeded any we had before witnessed; the light was so strong it would have been easy to read or write. "How strange was it that light, proceeding from the sun, which was at such a prodigious distance, and at that time entirely out of sight, should be reflected from the moon, and that was no trifling

journey, and sent back to the earth in such abundance, and with so great force ! ”

Languid expressions of admiration dropped from our lips as we stretched our stiff and wearied limbs towards the genial warmth of a blazing fire. On a sudden Shelley started from his seat, seized one of the candles, and began to walk about the room on tiptoe in profound silence, often stooping low, and evidently engaged in some mysterious search. I asked him what he wanted, but he returned no answer, and continued his whimsical and secret inquisition, which he prosecuted in the same extraordinary manner in the bedroom and the little study. It had occurred to him that a dessert had possibly been sent to his rooms whilst we were absent, and had been put away. He found the object of his pursuit at last, and produced some small dishes from the study — apples, oranges, almonds and raisins and a little cake. These he set close together at my side of the table, without speaking, but with

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a triumphant look, yet with the air of a penitent making restitution and reparation, and then resumed his seat. The unexpected succour was very seasonable; this light fare, a few glasses of negus, warmth, and especially rest, restored our lost vigour and our spirits. We spoke of our happy life, of universities, of what they might be, of what they were. How powerfully they might stimulate the student, how much valuable instruction they might impart. We agreed that, although the least possible benefit was conferred upon us in this respect at Oxford, we were deeply indebted, nevertheless, to the great and good men of former days, who founded those glorious institutions, for devising a scheme of life, which, however deflected from its original direction, still tended to study, and especially for creating establishments that called young men together from all parts of the empire, and for endowing them with a celebrity that was able to induce so many to congregate. Without such an opportunity of meeting we

should never have been acquainted with each other. In so large a body there must doubtless be many at that time who were equally thankful for the occasion of the like intimacy, and in former generations how many friendships, that had endured through all the various trials of a long and eventful life, had arisen here from accidental communion, as in our case.

If there was little positive encouragement, there were various negative inducements to acquire learning; there were no interruptions, no secular cares; our wants were well supplied without the slightest exertion on our part, and the exact regularity of academical existence cut off that dissipation of the hours and the thoughts which so often prevails where the daily course is not pre-arranged. The necessity of early rising was beneficial. Like the Pythagoreans of old, we began with the gods; the salutary attendance in chapel every morning not only compelled us to quit our bed betimes, but imposed additional duties conducive to habits of

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industry. It was requisite not merely to rise, but to leave our rooms, to appear in public and to remain long enough to destroy the disposition to indolence which might still linger if we were permitted to remain by the fireside. To pass some minutes in society, yet in solemn silence, is like the Pythagorean initiation, and we auspicate the day happily by commencing with sacred things. I scarcely ever visited Shelley before one o'clock; when I met him in the morning at chapel, he used studiously to avoid all communication, and, as soon as the doors were opened, to effect a ludicrously precipitate retreat to his rooms.

"The country near Oxford," he continued, as we reposed after our meagre supper, "has no pretensions to peculiar beauty, but it is quiet, and pleasant, and rural, and purely agricultural after the good old fashion. It is not only unpolluted by manufactures and commerce, but it is exempt from the desecration of the modern husbandry, of a system which accounts

the farmer a manufacturer of hay and corn. I delight to wander over it." He enlarged upon the pleasure of our pedestrian excursions, and added, "I can imagine few things that would annoy me more severely than to be disturbed in our tranquil course. It would be a cruel calamity to be interrupted by some untoward accident, to be compelled to quit our calm and agreeable retreat. Not only would it be a sad mortification, but a real misfortune, for if I remain here I shall study more closely and with greater advantage than I could in any other situation that I can conceive. Are you not of the same opinion?"

"Entirely."

"I regret only that the period of our residence is limited to four years. I wish they would revive, for our sake, the old term of six or seven years. If we consider how much there is for us to learn," here he paused and sighed deeply through that despondency which sometimes comes over the unwearied and zealous student, "we shall allow

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that the longer period would still be far too short ! ”

I assented, and we discoursed concerning the abridgement of the ancient term of residence, and the diminution of the academical year by frequent, protracted, and most inconvenient vacations.

“To quit Oxford,” he said, “would be still more unpleasant to you than to myself, for you aim at objects that I do not seek to compass, and you cannot fail, since you are resolved to place your success beyond the reach of chance.”

He enumerated with extreme rapidity, and in his enthusiastic strain, some of the benefits and comforts of a college life.

“Then the *oak* is such a blessing,” he exclaimed, with peculiar fervour, clasping his hands, and repeating often, “The oak is such a blessing !” slowly and in a solemn tone. “The oak alone goes far towards making this place a paradise. In what other spot in the world, surely in none that I have hitherto visited, can you say confidently, it is perfectly

impossible, physically impossible, that I should be disturbed? Whether a man desire solitary study, or to enjoy the society of a friend or two, he is secure against interruption. It is not so in a house, not by any means; there is not the same protection in a house, even in the best-contrived house. The servant is bound to answer the door; he must appear and give some excuse; he may betray by hesitation and confusion that he utters a falsehood; he must expose himself to be questioned; he must open the door and violate your privacy in some degree; besides, there are other doors, there are windows, at least, through which a prying eye can detect some indication that betrays the mystery. How different is it here! The bore arrives; the outer door is shut; it is black and solemn, and perfectly impenetrable, as is your secret; the doors are all alike; he can distinguish mine from yours by the geographical position only. He may knock; he may call; he may kick, if he will; he may inquire of a neighbour, but he can inform him of

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nothing ; he can only say, the door is shut, and this he knows already. He may leave his card, that you may rejoice over it, and at your escape ; he may write upon it the hour when he proposes to call again, to put you upon your guard, and that he may be quite sure of seeing the back of your door once more. When the bore meets you and says, I called at your house at such a time, you are required to explain your absence, to prove an *alibi*, in short, and perhaps to undergo a rigid cross-examination ; but if he tells you, ‘I called at your rooms yesterday at three, and the door was shut,’ you have only to say, ‘Did you ? Was it ?’ and there the matter ends.”

“Were you not charmed with your oak ? Did it not instantly captivate you ?”

“My introduction to it was somewhat unpleasant and unpropitious. The morning after my arrival I was sitting at breakfast ; my scout, the Arimaspiian, apprehending that the singleness of his eye may impeach his character for

officiousness, in order to escape the reproach of seeing half as much only as other men, is always striving to prove that he sees at least twice as far as the most sharp-sighted. After many demonstrations of superabundant activity, he inquired if I wanted anything more ; I answered in the negative. He had already opened the door : ‘ Shall I sport, sir ? ’ he asked briskly, as he stood upon the threshold. He seemed so unlike a sporting character that I was curious to learn in what sport he proposed to indulge. I answered, ‘ Yes, by all means,’ and anxiously watched him, but, to my surprise and disappointment he instantly vanished. As soon as I had finished my breakfast, I sallied forth to survey Oxford. I opened one door quickly and, not suspecting that there was a second, I struck my head against it with some violence. The blow taught me to observe that every set of rooms has two doors, and I soon learned that the outer door, which is thick and solid, is called the oak, and to shut it is termed, to sport. I derived so much

benefit from my oak that I soon pardoned this slight inconvenience. It is surely the tree of knowledge."

"Who invented the oak?"

"The inventors of the science of living in rooms or chambers—the Monks."

"Ah! they were sly fellows. None but men who were reputed to devote themselves for many hours to prayers, to religious meditations and holy abstractions, would ever have been permitted quietly to place at pleasure such a barrier between themselves and the world. We now reap the advantage of their reputation for sanctity. I shall revere my oak more than ever, since its origin is so sacred."

CHAPTER III

THE sympathies of Shelley were instantaneous and powerful with those who evinced in any degree the qualities, for which he was himself so remarkable—simplicity of character, unaffected manners, genuine modesty and an honest willingness to acquire knowledge, and he sprang to meet their advances with an ingenuous eagerness which was peculiar to him ; but he was suddenly and violently repelled, like the needle from the negative pole of the magnet, by any indication of pedantry, presumption or affectation. So much was he disposed to take offence at such defects, and so acutely was he sensible of them, that he was sometimes unjust, through an excessive sensitiveness, in his estimate of those who had shocked him by sins, of which he was himself utterly incapable.

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Whatever might be the attainments, and however solid the merits of the persons filling at that time the important office of instructors in the University, they were entirely destitute of the attractions of manner; their address was sometimes repulsive, and the formal, priggish tutor was too often intent upon the ordinary academical course alone to the entire exclusion of every other department of knowledge: his thoughts were wholly engrossed by it, and so narrow were his views, that he overlooked the claims of all merit, however exalted, except success in the public examinations.

“They are very dull people here,” Shelley said to me one evening, soon after his arrival, with a long-drawn sigh, after musing a while. “A little man sent for me this morning and told me in an almost inaudible whisper that I must read. ‘You must read,’ he said many times in his small voice. I answered that I had no objection. He persisted; so, to satisfy him, for he did not appear to believe me, I told him I had some

books in my pocket, and I began to take them out. He stared at me and said that was not exactly what he meant. 'You must read *Prometheus Vincit*, and Demosthenes *De Corona* and Euclid.' 'Must I read Euclid?' I asked sorrowfully. 'Yes, certainly; and when you have read the Greek I have mentioned, you must begin Aristotle's *Ethics*, and then you may go on his other treatises. It is of the utmost importance to be well acquainted with Aristotle.' This he repeated so often that I was quite tired, and at last I said, 'Must I care about Aristotle? What if I do not mind Aristotle?' I then left him, for he seemed to be in great perplexity."

Notwithstanding the slight he had thus cast upon the great master of the science that has so long been the staple of Oxford, he was not blind to the value of the science itself. He took the scholastic logic very kindly, seized its distinctions with his accustomed quickness, felt a keen interest in the study and patiently endured the exposition of those minute discriminations, which the

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tyro is apt to condemn as vain and trifling.

It should seem that the ancient method of communicating the art of syllogising has been preserved, in part at least, by tradition in this university. I have sometimes met with learned foreigners, who understood the end and object of the scholastic logic, having received the traditional instruction in some of the old universities on the Continent ; but I never found even one of my countrymen, except Oxonians, who rightly comprehended the nature of the science. I may, perhaps, add that, in proportion as the self-taught logicians had laboured in the pursuit, they had gone far astray. It is possible, nevertheless, that those who have drunk at the fountain head and have read the *Organon* of Aristotle in the original, may have attained to a just comprehension by their unassisted energies ; but in this age and in this country, I apprehend the number of such adventurous readers is very considerable.

Shelley frequently exercised his ingen-

uity in long discussions respecting various questions in logic, and more frequently indulged in metaphysical inquiries. We read several metaphysical works together, in whole or in part, for the first time, or after a previous perusal by one or by both of us.

The examination of a chapter of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* would induce him, at any moment, to quit every other pursuit. We read together Hume's *Essays*, and some productions of Scotch metaphysicians of inferior ability — all with assiduous and friendly altercations, and the latter writers, at least, with small profit, unless some sparks of knowledge were struck out in the collision of debate. We read also certain popular French works that treat of man for the most part in a mixed method, metaphysically, morally and politically. Hume's *Essays* were a favourite book with Shelley, and he was always ready to put forward in argument the doctrines they uphold.

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It may seem strange that he should ever have accepted the sceptical philosophy, a system so uncongenial with a fervid and imaginative genius, which can allure the cool, cautious, abstinent reasoner alone, and would deter the enthusiastic, the fanciful and the speculative. We must bear in mind, however, that he was an eager, bold, unwearied disputant; and although the position, in which the sceptic and the materialist love to entrench themselves, offers no picturesque attractions to the eye of the poet, it is well adapted for defensive warfare, and it is not easy for an ordinary enemy to dislodge him, who occupies a post that derives strength from the weakness of the assailant. It has been insinuated that, whenever a man of real talent and generous feelings condescends to fight under these colours, he is guilty of a dissimulation, which he deems harmless, perhaps even praiseworthy, for the sake of victory in argument.

It was not a little curious to observe one, whose sanguine temper led him to

believe implicitly every assertion, so that it was improbable and incredible, exulting in the success of his philosophical doubts, when, like the calmest and most suspicious of analysts, he refused to admit, without strict proof, propositions that many, who are not deficient in metaphysical prudence, account obvious and self-evident. The sceptical philosophy had another charm ; it partook of the new and the wonderful, inasmuch as it called into doubt, and seemed to place in jeopardy during the joyous hours of disputation, many important practical conclusions. To a soul loving excitement and change, destruction, so that it be on a grand scale, may sometimes prove hardly less inspiring than creation. The feat of the magician, who, by the touch of his wand, could cause the Great Pyramid to dissolve into the air and to vanish from the sight, would be as surprising as the achievement of him, who, by the same rod, could instantly raise a similar mass in any chosen spot. If the destruction of the eternal monument

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was only apparent, the ocular sophism would be at once harmless and ingenuous : so was it with the logomachy of the young and strenuous logician, and his intellectual activity merited praise and reward.

There was another reason, moreover, why the sceptical philosophy should be welcome to Shelley at that time : he was young, and it is generally acceptable to youth. It is adopted as the abiding rule of reason throughout life, by those only who are distinguished by a sterility of soul, a barrenness of invention, a total dearth of fancy and a scanty stock of learning. Such, in truth, although the warmth of juvenile blood, the light burthen of few years and the precipitation of inexperience may sometimes seem to contradict the assertion, is the state of the mind at the commencement of manhood, when the vessel has as yet received only a small portion of the cargo of the accumulated wisdom of past ages, when the amount of mental operations that have actually been performed is small, and the materials

upon which the imagination can work are insignificant; consequently, the inventions of the young are crude and frigid.

Hence the most fertile mind exactly resembles in early youth the hopeless barrenness of those who have grown old in vain as to its actual condition, and it differs only in the unseen capacity for future production. The philosopher who declares that he knows nothing, and that nothing can be known, will readily find followers among the young, for they are sensible that they possess the requisite qualifications for entering his school, and are as far advanced in the science of ignorance as their master.

A stranger who should have chanced to have been present at some of Shelley's disputes, or who knew him only from having read some of the short argumentative essays which he composed as voluntary exercises, would have said, "Surely the soul of Hume passed by transmigration into the body of that eloquent young man; or, rather, he

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represents one of the enthusiastic and animated materialists of the French schools, whom revolutionary violence lately intercepted at an early age in his philosophical career."

There were times, however, when a visitor, who had listened to glowing discourses delivered with a more intense ardour, would have hailed a young Platonist, breathing forth the ideal philosophy, and in his pursuit of the intellectual world entirely overlooking the material or noticing it only to condemn it. The tall boy, who is permitted for the first season to scare the partridges with his new fowling-piece, scorns to handle the top or the hoop of his younger brother; thus the man, whose years and studies are mature, slights the first feeble aspirations after the higher departments of knowledge, that were deemed so important during his residence at college. It seems laughable, but it is true, that our knowledge of Plato was derived solely from Dacier's translation of a few of the dialogues, and from an English

version of the French translation : we had never attempted a single sentence in the Greek. Since that time, however, I believe, few of our countrymen have read the golden works of that majestic philosopher in the original language more frequently and more carefully than ourselves ; and few, if any, with more profit than Shelley. Although the source, whence flowed our earliest taste of the divine philosophy, was scanty and turbid, the draught was not the less grateful to our lips : our zeal in some measure atoned for our poverty.

Shelley was never weary of reading, or of listening to me whilst I read, passages from the dialogues contained in this collection, and especially from the *Phædo* ; and he was vehemently excited by the striking doctrines which Socrates unfolds, especially by that which teaches that all our knowledge consists of reminiscences of what we had learned in a former existence. He often rose, paced slowly about the room, shook his long, wild locks and discoursed in a solemn

tone and with a mysterious air, speculating concerning our previous condition, and the nature of our life and occupations in that world, where, according to Plato, we had attained to erudition, and had advanced ourselves in knowledge so far that the most studious and the most inventive, or, in other words, those who have the best memory, are able to call back a part only, and with much pain and extreme difficulty, of what was formerly familiar to us.

It is hazardous, however, to speak of his earliest efforts as a Platonist, lest they should be confounded with his subsequent advancement; it is not easy to describe his first introduction to the exalted wisdom of antiquity without borrowing inadvertently from the knowledge which he afterwards acquired. The cold, ungenial, foggy atmosphere of northern metaphysics was less suited to the ardent temperament of his soul than the warm, bright, vivifying climate of southern and eastern philosophy. His genius expanded under the benign influence of the latter, and he derived

copious instruction from a luminous system, that is only dark through excess of brightness, and seems obscure to vulgar vision through its extreme radiance. Nevertheless, in argument—and to argue on all questions was his dominant passion—he usually adopted the scheme of the sceptics, partly, perhaps, because it was more popular and is more generally understood. The disputant, who would use Plato as his text-book in this age, would reduce his opponents to a small number indeed.

The study of that highest department of ethics, which includes all the inferior branches and is directed towards the noblest and most important ends of jurisprudence, was always next my heart; at an early age it attracted my attention.

When I first endeavoured to turn the regards of Shelley towards this engaging pursuit, he strongly expressed a very decided aversion to such inquiries, deeming them worthless and illiberal. The beautiful theory of the art of right, and the honourable office of administer-

ing distributive justice, have been brought into general discredit, unhappily for the best interests of humanity, and to the vast detriment of the state, into unmerited disgrace in the modern world by the errors of practitioners. An ingenuous mind instinctively shrinks from the contemplation of legal topics, because the word law is associated with, and inevitably calls up the idea of the low chicanery of a pettifogging attorney, of the vulgar oppression and gross insolence of a bailiff, or at best, of the wearisome and unmeaning tautology that distends an Act of Parliament, and the dull dropsical compositions of the special pleader, the conveyancer or other draughtsman.

In no country is this unhappy debasement of a most illustrious science more remarkable than in our own; no other nation is so prone to, or so patient of, abuses; in no other land are posts, in themselves honourable, so accessible to the meanest. The spirit of trade favours the degradation, and every commercial town is a well-spring of

vulgarity, which sends forth hosts of practitioners devoid of the solid and elegant attainments which could sustain the credit of the science, but so strong in the artifices that insure success, as not only to monopolise the rewards due to merit, but sometimes even to climb the judgment-seat.

It is not wonderful, therefore, that generous minds, until they have been taught to discriminate, and to distinguish a noble science from ignoble practices, should usually confound them together, hastily condemning the former with the latter. Shelley listened with much attention to questions of natural law, and with the warm interest that he felt in all metaphysical disquisitions, after he had conquered his first prejudice against practical jurisprudence.

The science of right, like other profound and extensive sciences, can only be acquired completely when the foundations have been laid at an early age. Had the energies of Shelley's vigorous mind taken this direction at that time, it is impossible to doubt that

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he would have become a distinguished jurist. Besides that fondness for such inquiries which is necessary to success in any liberal pursuit, he displayed the most acute sensitiveness of injustice, however slight, and a vivid perception of inconvenience. As soon as a wrong, arising from a proposed enactment or a supposed decision, was suggested, he instantly rushed into the opposite extreme ; and when a greater evil was shown to result from the contrary course which he had so hastily adopted, his intellect was roused, and he endeavoured most earnestly to ascertain the true mean that would secure the just by avoiding the unjust extremes.

I have observed in young men that the propensity to plunge headlong into a net of difficulty, on being startled at an apparent want of equity in any rule that was propounded, although at first it might seem to imply a lack of caution and foresight—which are eminently the virtues of legislators and of judges—was an unerring prognostic of a natural aptitude for pursuits, wherein eminence

is inconsistent with an inertness of the moral sense, and a recklessness of the violation of rights, however remote and trifling. Various instances of such aptitude in Shelley might be furnished, but these studies are interesting to a limited number of persons only.

As the mind of Shelley was apt to acquire many of the most valuable branches of liberal knowledge, so there were other portions comprised within the circle of science, for the reception of which, however active and acute, it was entirely unfit. He rejected with marvellous impatience every mathematical discipline that was offered ; no problem could awaken the slightest curiosity, nor could he be made sensible of the beauty of any theorem. The method of demonstration had no charm for him. He complained of the insufferable prolixity and the vast tautology of Euclid and the other ancient gometricians ; and when the discoveries of modern analysts were presented, he was immediately distracted, and fell into endless musings.

With respect to the Oriental tongues,

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he coldly observed that the appearance of the characters was curious. Although he perused with more than ordinary eagerness the relations of travellers in the East and the translations of the marvellous tales of Oriental fancy, he was not attracted by the desire to penetrate the languages which veil these treasures. He would never deign to lend an ear or an eye for a moment to my Hebrew studies, in which I had made at that time some small progress ; nor could he be tempted to inquire into the value of the singular lore of the Rabbins.

He was able, like the many, to distinguish a violet from a sunflower and a cauliflower from a peony, but his botanical knowledge was more limited than that of the least skilful of common observers, for he was neglectful of flowers. He was incapable of apprehending the delicate distinctions of structure which form the basis of the beautiful classification of modern botanists. I was never able to impart even a glimpse of the merits of Ray or

Linnæus, or to encourage a hope that he would ever be competent to see the visible analogies that constitute the marked, yet mutually approaching *genera*, into which the productions of nature, and especially vegetables, are divided.

It may seem invidious to notice imperfections in a mind of the highest order, but the exercise of a due candour, however unwelcome, is required to satisfy those who were not acquainted with Shelley, that the admiration excited by his marvellous talents and manifold virtues in all who were so fortunate as to enjoy the opportunity of examining his merits by frequent intercourse, was not the result of the blind partiality that amiable and innocent dispositions, attractive manners and a noble and generous bearing sometimes create.

Shelley was always unwilling to visit the remarkable specimens of architecture, the objects of art, and the various antiquities that adorn Oxford ; although, if he encountered them by accident, and they were pointed out to him, he admired them more sincerely and

heartily than the generality of strangers, who, through compliance with fashion, ostentatiously sought them out. His favourite recreation, as I have already stated, was a free, unrestrained ramble into the country.

After quitting the city and its environs by walking briskly along the highway for several miles, it was his delight to strike boldly into the fields, to cross the country daringly on foot, as is usual with sportsmen when shooting ; to perform, as it were, a pedestrian steeplechase. He was strong, light and active, and in all respects well suited for such exploits, and we used frequently to traverse a considerable tract in this manner, especially when the frost had dried the land, had given complete solidity to the most treacherous paths, and had thrown a natural bridge over spots that in open weather during the winter would have been nearly impassable.

By resolutely piercing through a district in this manner we often stumbled upon objects in our humble

travels that created a certain surprise and interest; some of them are still fresh in my recollection. My susceptible companion was occasionally much delighted and strongly excited by incidents that would, perhaps, have seemed unimportant trifles to others.

One day we had penetrated somewhat farther than usual, for the ground was in excellent order, and as the day was intensely cold, although bright and sunny, we had pushed on with uncommon speed. I do not remember the direction we took; nor can I even determine on which side of the Thames our course lay. We had crossed roads and lanes, and had traversed open fields and inclosures; some tall and ancient trees were on our right hand; we skirted a little wood, and presently came to a small copse. It was guarded by an old hedge, or thicket; we were deflected, therefore, from our onward course towards the left, and we were winding round it, when the quick eye of my companion perceived a gap. He instantly dashed in with as much alacrity as if he

had suddenly caught a glimpse of a pheasant that he had lately wounded in a district where such game was scarce, and he disappeared in a moment.

I followed him, but with less ardour, and, passing through a narrow belt of wood and thicket, I presently found him standing motionless in one of his picturesque attitudes, riveted to the earth in speechless astonishment. He had thrown himself thus precipitately into a trim flower-garden of small dimensions, encompassed by a narrow, but close girdle of trees and underwood; it was apparently remote from all habitations, and it contrasted strongly with the bleak and bare country through which we had recently passed.

Had the secluded scene been bright with the gay flowers of spring, with hyacinths and tulips; had it been powdered with mealy auriculas or conspicuous for a gaudy show of all anemones and of every ranunculus; had it been profusely decorated by the innumerable roses of summer, it would be easy to understand why it was so

cheerful. But we were now in the very heart of winter, and after much frost scarcely a single wretched brumal flower lingered and languished. There was no foliage save the dark leaves of evergreens, and of them there were many, especially around and on the edges of the magic circle, on which account, possibly, but chiefly perhaps through the symmetry of the numerous small *parterres*, the scrupulous neatness of the corresponding walks, the just ordonnance and disposition of certain benches, the integrity and freshness of the green trellises, and of the skeletons of some arbours, and through every leafless excellence which the dried anatomy of a flower-garden can exhibit, its past and its future wealth seemed to shine forth in its present poverty, and its potential glories adorned its actual disgrace.

The sudden transition from the rugged fields to this garnished and decorated retreat was striking, and held my imagination captive a few moments. The impression, however, would probably have soon faded from my memory, had

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it not been fixed there by the recollection of the beings who gave animation and a permanent interest to the polished nook.

We admired the trim and retired garden for some minutes in silence, and afterwards each answered in monosyllables the other's brief expressions of wonder. Neither of us had advanced a single step beyond the edge of the thicket which we had entered; but I was about to precede, and to walk round the magic circle, in order fully to survey the place, when Shelley startled me by turning with astonishing rapidity, and dashing through the bushes and the gap in the fence with the mysterious and whimsical agility of a kangaroo. Had he caught a glimpse of a tiger crouching behind the laurels, and preparing to spring upon him, he could not have vanished more promptly or more silently. I was habituated to his abrupt movements, nevertheless his alacrity surprised me, and I tried in vain to discover what object had scared him away. I retired, therefore, to the gap, and

when I reached it, I saw him already at some distance, proceeding with gigantic strides nearly in the same route by which we came. I ran after him, and when I rejoined him, he had halted upon a turnpike-road and was hesitating as to the course he ought to pursue. It was our custom to advance across the country as far as the utmost limits of our time would permit, and to go back to Oxford by the first public road we found, after attaining the extreme distance to which we could venture to wander.

Having ascertained the route homeward, we pursued it quickly, as we were wont, but less rapidly than Shelley had commenced his hasty retreat. He had perceived that the garden was attached to a gentleman's house, and he had consequently quitted it thus precipitately. I had already observed on the right a winding path that led through a plantation to certain offices, which showed that a house was about a quarter of a mile from the spot where I then stood.

Had I been aware that the garden

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was connected with a residence, I certainly should not have trespassed upon it; but, having entered unconsciously, and since the owner was too far removed to be annoyed by observing the intrusion, I was tempted to remain a short time to examine a spot which, during my brief visit, seemed so singular. The superior and highly sensitive delicacy of my companion instantly took the alarm on discovering indications of a neighbouring mansion; hence his marvellous precipitancy in withdrawing himself from the garnished retirement he had unwittingly penetrated, and we advanced some distance along the road before he had entirely overcome his modest confusion.

Shelley had looked on the ornate inclosure with a poet's eye, and as we hastily pursued our course towards Oxford by the frozen and sounding way, whilst the day rapidly declined, he discoursed of it fancifully, and with a more glowing animation than ordinary, like one agitated by a divine fury, and by the impulse of inspiring deity. He

continued, indeed, so long to enlarge upon the marvels of the enchanted grove, that I hinted the enchantress might possibly be at hand, and since he was so eloquent concerning the nest, what would have been his astonishment had he been permitted to see the bird herself.

He sometimes described, with a curious fastidiousness, the qualities which a female must possess to kindle the fire of love in his bosom. The imaginative youth supposed that he was to be moved by the most absolute perfection alone. It is equally impossible to doubt the exquisite refinement of his taste, or the boundless power of the most mighty of divinities; to refuse to believe that he was a just and skilful critic of feminine beauty and grace, and of whatever is attractive, or that he was never practically as blind, at the least, as men of ordinary talent. How sadly should we disparage the triumphs of Love were we to maintain that he is able to lead astray the senses of the vulgar alone!

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In the theory of love, however, a poet will rarely err. Shelley's lively fancy had painted a goodly portraiture of the mistress of the fair garden, nor were apt words wanting to convey to me a faithful copy of the bright original. It would be a cruel injustice to an orator should a plain man attempt, after a silence of more than twenty years, to revive his glowing harangue from faded recollections. I will not seek, therefore, to pourtray the likeness of the ideal nymph of the flower-garden.

"Since your fairy gardener," I said, "has so completely taken possession of your imagination," and he was wonderfully excited by the unexpected scene and his own splendid decorations, "it is a pity we did not notice the situation, for I am quite sure I should not be able to return thither, to recover your Eden and the Eve, whom you created to till it, and I doubt whether you could guide me."

He acknowledged that he was as incapable of finding it again as of leading me to that paradise to which I had compared it.

“You may laugh at my enthusiasm,” he continued, “but you must allow that you were not less struck by the singularity of that mysterious corner of the earth than myself. You are equally entitled, therefore, to dwell there, at least, in fancy, and to find a partner whose character will harmonise with the genius of the place.”

He then declared, that thenceforth it should be deemed the possession of two tutelary nymphs, not of one ; and he proceeded with unabated fervour to delineate the second patroness, and to distinguish her from the first.

“No !” he exclaimed, pausing in the rapid career of words, and for a while he was somewhat troubled, “the seclusion is too sweet, too holy, to be the theatre of ordinary love ; the love of the sexes, however pure, still retains some taint of earthly grossness ; we must not admit it within the sanctuary.”

He was silent for several minutes, and his anxiety visibly increased.

“The love of a mother for a child is more refined ; it is more disinterested,

more spiritual; but," he added, after some reflection, "the very existence of the child still connects it with the passion which we have discarded," and he relapsed into his former musings.

"The love a sister bears towards a sister," he exclaimed abruptly, and with an air of triumph, "is unexceptionable."

This idea pleased him, and as he strode along he assigned the trim garden to two sisters, affirming, with the confidence of an inventor, that it owed its neatness to the assiduous culture of their neat hands; that it was their constant haunt; the care of it their favourite pastime, and its prosperity, next after the welfare of each other, the chief wish of both. He described their appearance, their habits, their feelings, and drew a lovely picture of their amiable and innocent attachment; of the meek and dutiful regard of the younger, which partook, in some degree, of filial reverence, but was more facile and familiar; and of the protecting, instructing, hoping fondness of the elder, that resembled maternal tenderness, but

had less of reserve and more of sympathy. In no other relation could the intimacy be equally perfect; not even between brothers, for their life is less domestic: there is a separation in their pursuits, and an independence in the masculine character. The occupations of all females of the same age and rank are the same, and by night sisters cherish each other in the same quiet nest. Their union wears not only the grace of delicacy, but of fragility also; for it is always liable to be suddenly destroyed by the marriage of either party, or, at least, to be interrupted and suspended for an indefinite period.

He depicted so eloquently the excellence of sisterly affection, and he drew so distinctly and so minutely the image of two sisters, to whom he chose to ascribe the unusual comeliness of the spot into which we had unintentionally intruded, that the trifling incident has been impressed upon my memory, and has been intimately associated in my mind, through his creations, with his poetic character.

CHAPTER IV

THE prince of Roman eloquence affirms that the good man alone can be a perfect orator, and truly; for without the weight of a spotless reputation it is certain that the most artful and elaborate discourse must want authority—the main ingredient in persuasion.

The position is, at least, equally true of the poet, whose grand strength always lies in the ethical force of his compositions, and these are great in proportion to the efficient greatness of their moral purpose. If, therefore, we would criticise poetry correctly, and from the foundation, it behoves us to examine the morality of the bard.

In no individual, perhaps, was the moral sense ever more completely developed than in Shelley; in no being was the perception of right and of

wrong more acute. The biographer who takes upon himself the pleasing and instructive, but difficult and delicate task of composing a faithful history of his whole life, will frequently be compelled to discuss the important questions, whether his conduct, at certain periods, was altogether such as ought to be proposed for imitation ; whether he was ever misled by an ardent imagination, a glowing temperament, something of hastiness in choice and a certain constitutional impatience ; whether, like less gifted mortals, he ever shared in the common portion of mortality—repentance, and to what extent ?

Such inquiries, however, do not fall within the compass of a brief narrative of his career at the University. The unmatured mind of a boy is capable of good intentions only and of generous and kindly feelings, and these were pre-eminent in him. It will be proper to unfold the excellence of his dispositions, not for the sake of vain and empty praise, but simply to show his aptitude to receive the sweet fury of the Muses.

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His inextinguishable thirst for knowledge, his boundless philanthropy, his fearless, it may be his almost imprudent pursuit of truth have been already exhibited. If mercy to beasts be a criterion of a good man, numerous instances of extreme tenderness would demonstrate his worth. I will mention one only.

We were walking one afternoon in Bagley wood ; on turning a corner we suddenly came upon a boy who was driving an ass. It was very young and very weak, and was staggering beneath a most disproportionate load of faggots, and he was belabouring its lean ribs angrily and violently with a short, thick, heavy cudgel.

At the sight of cruelty Shelley was instantly transported far beyond the usual measure of excitement. He sprang forward and was about to interpose with energetic and indignant vehemence. I caught him by the arm and to his present annoyance held him back, and with much difficulty persuaded him to allow me to be the advocate of

the dumb animal. His cheeks glowed with displeasure and his lips murmured his impatience during my brief dialogue with the young tyrant.

"That is a sorry little ass, boy," I said ; "it seems to have scarcely any strength."

"None at all ; it is good for nothing."

"It cannot get on ; it can hardly stand. If anybody could make it go, you would ; you have taken great pains with it."

"Yes, I have ; but it is to no purpose !"

"It is of little use striking it, I think."

"It is not worth beating. The stupid beast has got more wood now than it can carry ; it can hardly stand, you see !"

"I suppose it put it upon its back itself?"

The boy was silent ; I repeated the question.

"No ; it has not sense enough for that," he replied, with an incredulous leer.

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By dint of repeated blows he had split his cudgel, and the sound caused by the divided portion had alarmed Shelley's humanity. I pointed to it and said, "You have split your stick ; it is not good for much now."

He turned it, and held the divided end in his hand.

"The other end is whole, I see, but I suppose you could split that too on the ass's back, if you chose ; it is not so thick."

"It is not so thick, but it is full of knots. It would take a great deal of trouble to split it, and the beast is not worth that ; it would do no good !"

"It would do no good, certainly ; and if anybody saw you, he might say that you were a savage young ruffian and that you ought to be served in the same manner yourself."

The fellow looked at me in some surprise, and sank into sullen silence.

He presently threw his cudgel into the wood as far as he was able, and began to amuse himself by pelting the birds with pebbles, leaving my long-eared

client to proceed at its own pace, having made up his mind, perhaps, to be beaten himself, when he reached home, by a tyrant still more unreasonable than himself, on account of the inevitable default of his ass.

Shelley was satisfied with the result of our conversation, and I repeated to him the history of the injudicious and unfortunate interference of Don Quixote between the peasant, John Haldudo, and his servant, Andrew. Although he reluctantly admitted that the acrimony of humanity might often aggravate the sufferings of the oppressed by provoking the oppressor, I always observed that the impulse of generous indignation, on witnessing the infliction of pain, was too vivid to allow him to pause and consider the probable consequences of the abrupt interposition of the knight-errantry, which would at once redress all grievances. Such exquisite sensibility and a sympathy with suffering so acute and so uncontrolled may possibly be inconsistent with the calmness and forethought of the philosopher, but they

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accord well with the high temperature of a poet's blood.

As his port had the meekness of a maiden, so the heart of the young virgin who had never crossed her father's threshold to encounter the rude world, could not be more susceptible of all the sweet domestic charities than his : in this respect Shelley's disposition would happily illustrate the innocence and virginity of the Muses.

In most men, and especially in very young men, an excessive addiction to study tends to chill the heart and to blunt the feelings, by engrossing the attention. Notwithstanding his extreme devotion to literature, and amidst his various and ardent speculations, he retained a most affectionate regard for his relations, and particularly for the females of his family ; it was not without manifest joy that he received a letter from his mother or his sisters.

A child of genius is seldom duly appreciated by the world during his life, least of all by his own kindred. The parents of a man of talent may claim

the honour of having given him birth, yet they commonly enjoy but little of his society. Whilst we hang with delight over the immortal pages, we are apt to suppose that the gifted author was fondly cherished ; that a possession so uncommon and so precious was highly prized ; that his contemporaries anxiously watched his going out and eagerly looked for his coming in ; for we should ourselves have borne him tenderly in our hands, that he might not dash his foot against a stone. Surely such an one was given in charge to angels, we cry. On the contrary, Nature appears most unaccountably to slight a gift that she gave grudgingly, as if it were of small value, and easily replaced.

An unusual number of books, Greek or Latin classics, each inscribed with the name of the donor, which had been presented to him, according to custom, on quitting Eton, attested that Shelley had been popular among his school-fellows. Many of them were then at Oxford, and they frequently called at his rooms. Although he spoke of them

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with regard, he generally avoided their society, for it interfered with his beloved study, and interrupted the pursuits to which he ardently and entirely devoted himself.

In the nine centuries that elapsed from the time of our great founder, Alfred, to our days, there never was a student who more richly merited the favour and assistance of a learned body, or whose fruitful mind would have repaid with a larger harvest the labour of careful and judicious cultivation. And such cultivation he was well entitled to receive. Nor did his scholar-like virtues merit neglect, still less to be betrayed, like the young nobles of Falisci, by a traitorous school-master to an enemy less generous than Camillus. No student ever read more assiduously. He was to be found book in hand at all hours, reading in season and out of season, at table, in bed and especially during a walk ; not only in the quiet country and in retired paths ; not only at Oxford in the public walks and High Street, but in

the most crowded thoroughfares of London. Nor was he less absorbed by the volume that was open before him in Cheapside, in Cranbourne Alley or in Bond Street, than in a lonely lane, or a secluded library.

Sometimes a vulgar fellow would attempt to insult or annoy the eccentric student in passing. Shelley always avoided the malignant interruption by stepping aside with his vast and quiet agility.

Sometimes I have observed, as an agreeable contrast to these wretched men, that persons of the humblest station have paused and gazed with respectful wonder as he advanced, almost unconscious of the throng, stooping low, with bent knees and outstretched neck, poring earnestly over the volume, which he extended before him; for they knew this, although the simple people knew but little, that an ardent scholar is worthy of deference, and that the man of learning is necessarily the friend of humanity, and especially of the many. I never beheld eyes that devoured the

pages more voraciously than his. I am convinced that two-thirds of the period of the day and night were often employed in reading. It is no exaggeration to affirm, that out of the twenty-four hours he frequently read sixteen. At Oxford his diligence in this respect was exemplary, but it greatly increased afterwards, and I sometimes thought that he carried it to a pernicious excess. I am sure, at least, that I was unable to keep pace with him.

On the evening of a wet day, when we had read with scarcely any intermission from an early hour in the morning, I have urged him to lay aside his book. It required some extravagance to rouse him to join heartily in conversation ; to tempt him to avoid the chimney-piece on which commonly he had laid the open volume.

“If I were to read as long as you read, Shelley, my hair and my teeth would be strewed about on the floor, and my eyes would slip down my cheeks into my waistcoat pockets, or, at least, I should become so weary and nervous that

I should not know whether it were so or not."

He began to scrape the carpet with his feet, as if teeth were actually lying upon it, and he looked fixedly at my face, and his lively fancy represented the empty sockets. His imagination was excited, and the spell that bound him to his books was broken, and, creeping close to the fire, and, as it were, under the fireplace, he commenced a most animated discourse.

Few were aware of the extent, and still fewer, I apprehend, of the profundity of his reading. In his short life and without ostentation he had in truth read more Greek than many an aged pedant, who with pompous parade prides himself upon this study alone. Although he had not entered critically into the minute niceties of the noblest of languages, he was thoroughly conversant with the valuable matter it contains. A pocket edition of Plato, of Plutarch, of Euripides, without interpretation or notes, or of the Septuagint, was his ordinary companion; and he read the text straightforward for hours, if not

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as readily as an English author, at least with as much facility as French, Italian or Spanish.

“Upon my soul, Shelley, your style of going through a Greek book is something quite beautiful!” was the wondering exclamation of one who was himself no mean student.

As his love of intellectual pursuits was vehement, and the vigour of his genius almost celestial, so were the purity and sanctity of his life most conspicuous.

His food was plain and simple as that of a hermit, with a certain anticipation, even at this time, of a vegetable diet, respecting which he afterwards became an enthusiast in theory, and in practice an irregular votary.

With his usual fondness for moving the abstruse and difficult questions of the highest theology, he loved to inquire whether man can justify, on the ground of reason alone, the practice of taking the life of the inferior animals, except in the necessary defence of his life and of his means of life, the fruits of that field which he has tilled, from violence and spoliation.

“Not only have considerable sects,” he would say, “denied the right altogether, but those among the tender-hearted and imaginative people of antiquity, who accounted it lawful to kill and eat, appear to have doubted whether they might take away life merely for the use of man alone. They slew their cattle, not simply for human guests, like the less scrupulous butchers of modern times, but only as a sacrifice, for the honour and in the name of the Deity ; or, rather, of those subordinate divinities, to whom, as they believed, the Supreme Being had assigned the creation and conservation of the visible material world. As an incident to these pious offerings, they partook of the residue of the victims, of which, without such sanction and sanctification, they would not have presumed to taste. So reverent was the caution of humane and prudent antiquity !

Bread became his chief sustenance when his regimen attained to that austerity which afterwards distinguished it. He could have lived on bread alone

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without repining. When he was walking in London with an acquaintance, he would suddenly run into a baker's shop, purchase a supply, and breaking a loaf he would offer half of it to his companion.

"Do you know," he said to me one day, with much surprise, "that such an one does not like bread? Did you ever know a person who disliked bread?" And he told me that a friend had refused such an offer.

I explained to him that the individual in question probably had no objection to bread in a moderate quantity at a proper time and with the usual adjuncts, and was only unwilling to devour two or three pounds of dry bread in the streets, and at an early hour.

Shelley had no such scruple; his pockets were generally well-stored with bread. A circle upon the carpet, clearly defined by an ample verge of crumbs, often marked the place where he had long sat at his studies, his face nearly in contact with his book, greedily devouring bread at intervals amidst his profound abstractions. For the most part he took

no condiments ; sometimes, however, he ate with his bread the common raisins which are used in making puddings, and these he would buy at little mean shops.

He was walking one day in London with a respectable solicitor who occasionally transacted business for him. With his accustomed precipitation he suddenly vanished and as suddenly reappeared : he had entered the shop of a little grocer in an obscure quarter, and had returned with some plums, which he held close under the attorney's nose, and the man of fact was as much astonished at the offer as his client, the man of fancy, at the refusal.

The common fruit of stalls, and oranges and apples were always welcome to Shelley ; he would crunch the latter as heartily as a schoolboy. Vegetables, and especially salads, and pies and puddings were acceptable. His beverage consisted of copious and frequent draughts of cold water, but tea was ever grateful, cup after cup, and coffee. Wine was taken with singular moderation, commonly diluted largely with water, and for a

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long period he would abstain from it altogether. He avoided the use of spirits almost invariably, and even in the most minute portions.

Like all persons of simple tastes, he retained his sweet tooth. He would greedily eat cakes, gingerbread and sugar; honey, preserved or stewed fruit with bread, were his favourite delicacies. These he thankfully and joyfully received from others, but he rarely sought for them or provided them for himself. The restraint and protracted duration of a convivial meal were intolerable; he was seldom able to keep his seat during the brief period assigned to an ordinary family dinner.

These particulars may seem trifling, if indeed anything can be little that has reference to a character truly great; but they prove how much he was ashamed that his soul was in body, and illustrate the virgin abstinence of a mind equally favoured by the Muses, the Graces and Philosophy. It is true, however, that his application at Oxford, although exemplary, was not so unremitting as it

afterwards became ; nor was his diet, although singularly temperate, so meagre. However, his mode of living already offered a foretaste of the studious seclusion and absolute renunciation of every luxurious indulgence which ennobled him a few years later.

Had a parent desired that his children should be exactly trained to an ascetic life and should be taught by an eminent example to scorn delights and to live laborious days, that they should behold a pattern of native innocence and genuine simplicity of manners, he would have consigned them to his house as to a temple or to some primitive and still unsophisticated monastery.

It is an invidious thing to compose a perpetual panegyric, yet it is difficult to speak of Shelley, and impossible to speak justly, without often praising him. It is difficult also to divest myself of later recollections ; to forget for a while what he became in days subsequent, and to remember only what he then was, when we were fellow-collegians. It is difficult, moreover,

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to view him with the mind which I then bore — with a young mind, to lay aside the seriousness of old age ; for twenty years of assiduous study have induced, if not in the body, at least within, something of premature old age.

It now seems an incredible thing, and altogether inconceivable, when I consider the gravity of Shelley and his invincible repugnance to the comic, that the monkey tricks of the schoolboy could have still lingered, but it is certain that some slight vestiges still remained. The metaphysician of eighteen actually attempted once or twice to electrify the son of his scout, a boy like a sheep, by name James, who roared aloud with ludicrous and stupid terror, whenever Shelley affected to bring by stealth any part of his philosophical apparatus near to him.

As Shelley's health and strength were visibly augmented, if by accident he was obliged to accept a more generous diet than ordinary, and as his mind sometimes appeared to be exhausted

by never-ending toil, I often blamed his abstinence and his perpetual application. It is the office of a University, of a public institution for education, not only to apply the spur to the sluggish, but also to rein in the young steed, that, being too mettlesome, hastens with undue speed towards the goal.

“It is a very odd thing, but every woman can live with my lord and do just what she pleases with him, except my lady!” Such was the shrewd remark, which a long familiarity taught an old and attached servant to utter respecting his master, a noble poet.

We may wonder in like manner, and deeply lament, that the most docile, the most facile, the most pliant, the most confident creature that ever was led through any of the various paths on earth, that a tractable youth, who was conducted at pleasure by anybody that approached him—it might be occasionally by persons delegated by no legitimate authority — was never guided for a moment by those upon whom, fully and

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without reservation, that most solemn and sacred obligation had been imposed, strengthened, moreover, by every public and private, official and personal, moral, political and religious tie, which the civil polity of a long succession of ages could accumulate. Had the University been in fact, as in name, a kind nursing-mother to the most gifted of her sons, to one, who seemed, to those that knew him best,—

Heaven's exile straying from the orb of light ;

had that most awful responsibility, the right institution of those, to whom are to be consigned the government of the country and the conservation of whatever good human society has elaborated and excogitated, duly weighed upon the consciences of his instructors, they would have gained his entire confidence by frank kindness, they would have repressed his too eager impatience to master the sum of knowledge, they would have mitigated the rigorous austerity of his course of living, and they would have remitted

the extreme tension of his soul by reconciling him to liberal mirth; convincing him that, if life be not wholly a jest, there are at least many comic scenes occasionally interspersed in the great drama. Nor is the last benefit of trifling importance, for, as an unseemly and excessive gravity is usually the sign of a dull fellow, so is the prevalence of this defect the characteristic of an unlearned and illiberal age.

Shelley was actually offended, and indeed more indignant than would appear to be consistent with the singular mildness of his nature, at a coarse and awkward jest, especially if it were immodest or uncleanly; in the latter case his anger was unbounded, and his uneasiness pre-eminent. He was, however, sometimes vehemently delighted by exquisite and delicate sallies, particularly with a fanciful, and perhaps somewhat fantastical facetiousness — possibly the more because he was himself utterly incapable of pleasantry.

In every free state, in all countries that enjoy republican institutions, the

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view which each citizen takes of politics is an essential ingredient in the estimate of his ethical character. The wisdom of a very young man is but foolishness. Nevertheless, if we would rightly comprehend the moral and intellectual constitution of the youthful poet, it will be expedient to take into account the manner in which he was affected towards the grand political questions, at a period when the whole of the civilised world was agitated by a fierce storm of excitement, that, happily for the peace and well-being of society, is of rare occurrence.

CHAPTER V

“**A**BOVE all things, Liberty !” The political creed of Shelley may be comprised in a few words ; it was, in truth, that of most men, and in a peculiar manner of young men, during the freshness and early springs of revolutions. He held that not only is the greatest possible amount of civil liberty to be preferred to all other blessings, but that this advantage is all-sufficient, and comprehends within itself every other desirable object. The former position is as unquestionably true as the latter is undoubtedly false. It is no small praise, however, to a very young man, to say that on a subject so remote from the comprehension of youth his opinions were at least half right. Twenty years ago the young men at our Universities were satisfied with upholding the political

doctrines of which they approved by private discussions. They did not venture to form clubs of brothers and to move resolutions, except a small number of enthusiasts of doubtful sanity, who alone sought to usurp by crude and premature efforts the offices of a matured understanding and of manly experience.

Although our fellow-collegians were willing to learn before they took upon themselves the heavy and thankless charge of instructing others, there was no lack of beardless politicians amongst us. Of these, some were more strenuous supporters of the popular cause in our little circles than others; but all were abundantly liberal. A Brutus or a Gracchus would have found many to surpass him, and few, indeed, to fall short in theoretical devotion to the interests of equal freedom. I can scarcely recollect a single exception amongst my numerous acquaintances. All, I think were worthy of the best ages of Greece or of Rome; all were true, loyal citizens, brave and free. How, indeed, could it be otherwise? Liberty is the morning-

star of youth ; and those who enjoy the inappreciable blessing of a classical education, are taught betimes to lisp its praises. They are nurtured in the writings of its votaries, and they even learn their native tongue, as it were, at secondhand, and reflected in the glorious pages of the authors, who in the ancient languages and in strains of a noble eloquence, that will never fail to astonish succeeding generations, proclaim unceasingly, with every variety of powerful and energetic phrase, "Above all things, Liberty !" The praises of liberty were the favourite topic of our earliest verses, whether they flowed with natural ease, or were elaborated painfully out of the resources of art ; and the tyrant was set up as an object of scorn, to be pelted with the first ink of our themes. How, then, can an educated youth be other than free ?

Shelley was entirely devoted to the lovely theory of freedom ; but he was also eminently averse at that time from engaging in the far less beautiful practices, wherein are found the actual and operative

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energies of liberty. I was maintaining against him one day at my rooms the superiority of the ethical sciences over the physical. In the course of the debate he cried with shrill vehemence—for as his aspect presented to the eye much of the elegance of the peacock, so, in like manner, he cruelly lacerated the ear with its discordant tones—"You talk of the pre-eminence of moral philosophy? Do you comprehend politics under that name? and will you tell me, as others do, and as Plato, I believe, teaches, that of this philosophy the political department is the highest and the most important?" Without expecting an answer, he continued: "A certain nobleman" (and he named him) "advised me to turn my thoughts towards politics immediately. 'You cannot direct your attention that way too early in this country,' said the Duke. 'They are the proper career for a young man of ability and of your station in life. That course is the most advantageous, because it is a monopoly. A little success in that line goes far, since the number of competitors is limited; and of those who are admitted

to the contest, the greater part are altogether devoid of talent or too indolent to exert themselves. So many are excluded, that, of the few who are permitted to enter, it is difficult to find any that are not utterly unfit for the ordinary service of the state. It is not so in the church, it is not so at the bar ; there all may offer themselves. The number of rivals in those professions is far greater, and they are, besides, of a more formidable kind. In letters, your chance of success is still worse. There, none can win gold and all may try to gain reputation ; it is a struggle for glory—the competition is infinite, there are no bounds—that is a spacious field indeed, a sea without shores !’ The Duke talked thus to me many times and strongly urged me to give myself up to politics without delay, but he did not persuade me. With how unconquerable an aversion do I shrink from political articles in newspapers and reviews ? I have heard people talk politics by the hour, and how I hated it and them ! I went with my father several times to the House of Commons,

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and what creatures did I see there! What faces! what an expression of countenance! what wretched beings!" Here he clasped his hands, and raised his voice to a painful pitch, with fervid dislike. "Good God! what men did we meet about the House, in the lobbies and passages; and my father was so civil to all of them, to animals that I regarded with unmitigated disgust! A friend of mine, an Eton man, told me that his father once invited some corporation to dine at his house, and that he was present. When dinner was over, and the gentlemen nearly drunk, they started up, he said, and swore they would all kiss his sisters. His father laughed and did not forbid them, and the wretches would have done it; but his sisters heard of the infamous proposal, and ran upstairs, and locked themselves in their bedrooms. I asked him if he would not have knocked them down if they had attempted such an outrage in his presence. It seems to me that a man of spirit ought to have killed them if they had effected their purpose." The sceptical philosopher sat for several

minutes in silence, his cheeks glowing with intense indignation.

“Never did a more finished gentleman than Shelley step across a drawing-room !” Lord Byron exclaimed ; and on reading the remark in Mr Moore’s *Memoirs* I was struck forcibly by its justice, and wondered for a moment that, since it was so obvious, it had never been made before. Perhaps this excellence was blended so intimately with his entire nature, and it seemed to constitute a part of his identity, and being essential and necessary was therefore never noticed. I observed his eminence in this respect before I had sat beside him many minutes at our first meeting in the hall of University College. Since that day I have had the happiness to associate with some of the best specimens of gentlemen ; but with all due deference for those admirable persons (may my candour and my preference be pardoned), I can affirm that Shelley was almost the only example I have yet found that was never wanting, even in the most minute particular, of the infinite and various

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observances of pure, entire and perfect gentility. Trifling, indeed, and unimportant, were the aberrations of some whom I could name ; but in him, during a long and most unusual familiarity, I discovered no flaw, no tarnish ; the metal was sterling, and the polish absolute. I have also seen him, although rarely, "stepping across a drawing-room," and then his deportment, as Lord Byron testifies, was unexceptionable. Such attendances, however, were pain and grief to him, and his inward discomfort was not hard to be discerned.

An acute observer, whose experience of life was infinite, and who had been long and largely conversant with the best society in each of the principal capitals of Europe, had met Shelley, of whom he was a sincere admirer, several times in public. He remarked one evening, at a large party where Shelley was present, his extreme discomfort, and added, "It is but too plain that there is something radically wrong in the constitution of our assemblies, since such a man finds not pleasure, nor even ease, in them." His

speculations concerning the cause were ingenious, and would possibly be not altogether devoid of interest ; but they are wholly unconnected with the object of these scanty reminiscences.

Whilst Shelley was still a boy, clubs were few in number, of small dimensions, and generally confined to some specific class of persons. The universal and populous clubs of the present day were almost unknown. His reputation has increased so much of late, that the honour of including his name in the list of members, were such a distinction happily attainable, would now perhaps be sought by many of these societies ; but it is not less certain, that, for a period of nearly twenty years, he would have been black-balled by almost every club in London. Nor would such a fate be peculiar to him.

When a great man has attained to a certain eminence, his patronage is courted by those who were wont carefully to shun him, whilst he was quietly and steadily pursuing the path that would inevitably lead to advancement. It

would be easy to multiply instances, if proofs were needed, and this remarkable peculiarity of our social existence is an additional and irrefragable argument that the constitution of refined society is radically vicious, since it flatters timid, insipid mediocrity, and is opposed to the bold, fearless originality, and to that novelty which invariably characterise true genius. The first dawnings of talent are instantly hailed and warmly welcomed, as soon as some singularity unequivocally attests its existence amongst nations where hypocrisy and intolerance are less absolute.

If all men were required to name the greatest disappointment they had respectively experienced, the catalogue would be very various ; accordingly as the expectations of each had been elevated respecting the pleasure that would attend the gratification of some favourite wish, would the reality in almost every case have fallen short of the anticipation. The variety would be infinite as to the nature of the first disappointment ; but if the same irresistible authority could command that

another and another should be added to the list, it is probable that there would be less dissimilarity in the returns of the disappointments which were deemed second and the next in the importance to the greatest, and perhaps, in numerous instances, the third would coincide. Many individuals, having exhausted their principal private and peculiar grievances in the first and second examples, would assign the third place to some public and general matter.

The youth who has formed his conceptions of the power, effects and aspect of eloquence from the specimens furnished by the orators of Greece and Rome, receives as rude a shock on his first visit to the House of Commons as can possibly be inflicted on his juvenile expectations, where the subject is entirely unconnected with the interests of the individual. A prodigious number of persons would, doubtless, inscribe nearly at the top of the list of disappointments the deplorable and inconceivable inferiority of the actual to the imaginary debate. It is not wonderful, therefore, that the sensitive,

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the susceptible, the fastidious Shelley, whose lively fancy was easily wound up to a degree of excitement incomprehensible to calmer and more phlegmatic temperaments, felt keenly a mortification that can wound even the most obtuse intellects, and expressed with contemptuous acrimony his dissatisfaction at the cheat which his warm imagination had put upon him. Had he resolved to enter the career of politics, it is possible that habit would have reconciled him to many things which at first seemed to be repugnant to his nature. It is possible that his unwearied industry, his remarkable talents and vast energy would have led him to renown in that line as well as in another ; but it is most probable that his parliamentary success would have been but moderate. Opportunities of advancement were offered to him, and he rejected them, in the opinion of some of his friends unwisely and improperly ; but, perhaps, he only refused gifts that were unfit for him : he struck out a path for himself, and, by boldly following his own course, greatly as it deviated from

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that prescribed to him, he became incomparably more illustrious than he would have been had he steadily pursued the beaten track. His memory will be green when the herd of everyday politicians are forgotten. Ordinary rules may guide ordinary men, but the orbit of the child of genius is essentially eccentric.

Although the mind of Shelley had certainly a strong bias towards democracy, and he embraced with an ardent and youthful fondness the theory of political equality, his feelings and behaviour were in many respects highly aristocratical. The ideal republic, wherein his fancy loved to expatiate, was adorned by all the graces which Plato, Xenophon and Cicero have thrown around the memory of ancient liberty ; the unbleached web of transatlantic freedom, and the inconsiderate vehemence of such of our domestic patriots as would demonstrate their devotion to the good cause, by treating with irreverence whatever is most venerable, were equally repugnant to his sensitive and reverential spirit.

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As a politician Shelley was in theory wholly a republican, but in practice, so far only as it is possible to be one with due regard for the sacred rights of a scholar and a gentleman ; and these being in his eyes always more inviolable than any scheme of polity or civil institution, although he was upon paper and in discourse a sturdy commonwealth-man, the living, moving, acting individual had much of the senatorial and conservative, and was in the main eminently patrician.

The rare assiduity of the young poet in the acquisition of general knowledge has been already described ; he had, moreover, diligently studied the mechanism of his art before he came to Oxford. He composed Latin verses with singular facility. On visiting him soon after his arrival at the accustomed hour of one, we were writing the usual exercise, which we presented, I believe, once a week—a Latin translation of a paper in the *Spectator*. He soon finished it, and as he held it before the fire to dry, I offered to take it from him. He said it was not worth

looking at ; but as I persisted, through a certain scholastic curiosity to examine the Latinity of my new acquaintance, he gave it to me. The Latin was sufficiently correct, but the version was paraphrastic, which I observed. He assented, and said that it would pass muster, and he felt no interest in such efforts and no desire to excel in them. I also noticed many portions of heroic verses, and even several entire verses, and these I pointed out as defects in a prose composition. He smiled archly, and asked, in his piercing whisper, "Do you think they will observe them? I inserted them intentionally to try their ears! I once showed up a theme at Eton to old Keate, in which there were a great many verses ; but he observed them, scanned them, and asked why I had introduced them? I answered that I did not know they were there. This was partly true and partly false ; but he believed me, and immediately applied to me the line in which Ovid says of himself—

‘ Et quod tentabam dicere, versus erat.’ ”

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Shelley then spoke of the facility with which he could compose Latin verses ; and, taking the paper out of my hand, he began to put the entire translation into verse. He would sometimes open at hazard a prose writer, as Livy or Sallust, and, by changing the position of the words and occasionally substituting others, he would translate several sentences from prose to verse—to heroic, or more commonly elegiac, verse, for he was peculiarly charmed with the graceful and easy flow of the latter—with surprising rapidity and readiness. He was fond of displaying this accomplishment during his residence at Oxford, but he forgot to bring it away with him when he quitted the University ; or perhaps he left it behind him designedly, as being suitable to academic groves only and to the banks of the Isis. In Ovid the facility of versification in his native tongue was possibly in some measure innate, although the extensive and various learning of that poet demonstrate that the power of application was not wanting in him ; but such a command over a dead

language can only be acquired through severe study.

There is much in the poetry of Shelley that seems to encourage the belief, that the inspiration of the Muses was seldom duly hailed by the pious diligence of the recipient. It is true that his compositions were too often unfinished, but his example cannot encourage indolence in the youthful writer, for his carelessness is usually apparent only. He had really applied himself as strenuously to conquer all the other difficulties of his art, as he patiently laboured to penetrate the mysteries of metre in the state wherein it exists entire and can alone be attained—in one of the classical languages.

The poet takes his name from the highest effort of his art—creation; and, being himself a maker, he must, of necessity, feel a strong sympathy with the exercise of the creative energies. Shelley was exceedingly deficient in mechanical ingenuity; and he was also wanting in spontaneous curiosity respecting the operations of artificers. The wonderful dexterity of well-practised hands, the

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long tradition of innumerable ages, and the vast accumulation of technical wisdom that are manifested in the various handicrafts, have always been interesting to me, and I have ever loved to watch the artist at his work. I have often induced Shelley to take part in such observations, and although he never threw himself in the way of professors of the manual erudition of the workshop, his vivid delight in witnessing the marvels of the plastic hand, whenever they were brought before his eyes, was very striking ; and the rude workman was often gratified to find that his merit in one narrow field was, at once and intuitively, so fully appreciated by the young scholar. The instances are innumerable that would attest an unusual sympathy with the arts of construction even in their most simple stages.

I led him one summer's evening into a brickfield. It had never occurred to him to ask himself how a brick is formed ; the secret was revealed in a moment. He was charmed with the simple contrivance, and astonished at the rapidity, facility

and exactness with which it was put in use by so many busy hands. An ordinary observer would have smiled and passed on, but the son of fancy confessed his delight with an energy which roused the attention even of the ragged throng, that seemed to exist only that they might pass successive lumps of clay through a wooden frame.

I was surprised at the contrast between the general indifference of Shelley for the mechanical arts and his intense admiration of a particular application of one of them the first time I noticed the latter peculiarity. During our residence at Oxford I repaired to his rooms one morning at the accustomed hour, and I found a tailor with him. He had expected to receive a new coat on the preceding evening ; it was not sent home and he was mortified. I know not why, for he was commonly altogether indifferent about dress, and scarcely appeared to distinguish one coat from another. He was now standing erect in the middle of the room in his new blue coat, with all its glittering buttons, and,

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to atone for the delay, the tailor was loudly extolling the beauty of the cloth and the felicity of the fit ; his eloquence had not been thrown away upon his customer, for never was man more easily persuaded than the master of persuasion. The man of thimbles applied to me to vouch his eulogies. I briefly assented to them. He withdrew, after some bows, and Shelley, snatching his hat, cried with shrill impatience,—

“ Let us go ! ”

“ Do you mean to walk in the fields in your new coat ? ” I asked.

“ Yes, certainly,” he answered, and we sallied forth.

We sauntered for a moderate space through lanes and by-ways, until we reached a spot near to a farmhouse, where the frequent trampling of much cattle had rendered the road almost impassable, and deep with black mud ; but by crossing the corner of a stack-yard, from one gate to another, we could tread upon clean straw, and could wholly avoid the impure and impracticable slough.

We had nearly effected the brief and

commodious transit—I was stretching forth my hand to open the gate that led us back into the lane—when a lean, brindled and most ill-favoured mastiff, that had stolen upon us softly over the straw unheard and without barking, seized Shelley suddenly by the skirts. I instantly kicked the animal in the ribs with so much force that I felt for some days after the influence of his gaunt bones on my toe. The blow caused him to flinch towards the left, and Shelley, turning round quickly, planted a kick in his throat, which sent him sprawling, and made him retire hastily among the stacks, and we then entered the lane. The fury of the mastiff, and the rapid turn, had torn the skirts of the new blue coat across the back, just about that part of the human loins which our tailors, for some wise but inscrutable purpose, are wont to adorn with two buttons. They were entirely severed from the body, except a narrow strip of cloth on the left side, and this Shelley presently rent asunder.

I never saw him so angry either before or since. He vowed that he would

bring his pistols and shoot the dog, and that he would proceed at law against the owner. The fidelity of the dog towards his master is very beautiful in theory, and there is much to admire and to revere in this ancient and venerable alliance ; but, in practice, the most unexceptionable dog is a nuisance to all mankind, except his master, at all times, and very often to him also, and a fierce surly dog is the enemy of the whole human race. The farmyards in many parts of England are happily free from a pest that is formidable to everybody but thieves by profession ; in other districts savage dogs abound, and in none so much, according to my experience, as in the vicinity of Oxford. The neighbourhood of a still more famous city—of Rome—is likewise infested by dogs, more lowering, more ferocious and incomparably more powerful.

Shelley was proceeding home with rapid strides, bearing the skirts of his new coat on his left arm, to procure his pistols that he might wreak his vengeance upon the offending dog. I disliked the

race, but I did not desire to take an ignoble revenge upon the miserable individual.

“Let us try to fancy, Shelley,” I said to him, as he was posting away in indignant silence, “that we have been at Oxford, and have come back again, and that you have just laid the beast low—and what then?”

He was silent for some time, but I soon perceived, from the relaxation of his pace, that his anger had relaxed also.

At last he stopped short, and taking the skirts from his arm, spread them upon the hedge, stood gazing at them with a mournful aspect, sighed deeply and, after a few moments, continued his march.

“Would it not be better to take the skirts with us?” I inquired.

“No,” he answered despondingly; “let them remain as a spectacle for men and gods!”

We returned to Oxford, and made our way by back streets to our college. As we entered the gates the officious scout remarked with astonishment

Shelley's strange spencer, and asked for the skirts, that he might instantly carry the wreck to the tailor. Shelley answered, with his peculiarly pensive air, "They are upon the hedge."

The scout looked up at the clock, at Shelley and through the gate into the street, as it were at the same moment and with one eager glance, and would have run blindly in quest of them, but I drew the skirts from my pocket and unfolded them, and he followed us to Shelley's rooms.

We were sitting there in the evening at tea, when the tailor, who had praised the coat so warmly in the morning, brought it back as fresh as ever, and apparently uninjured. It had been fine-drawn. He showed how skilfully the wound had been healed, and he commended at some length the artist who had effected the cure. Shelley was astonished and delighted. Had the tailor consumed the new blue coat in one of his crucibles, and suddenly raised it, by magical incantation, a fresh and purple Phœnix from the ashes, his admiration

could hardly have been more vivid. It might be, in this instance, that his joy at the unexpected restoration of a coat, for which, although he was utterly indifferent to dress, he had, through some unaccountable caprice, conceived a fondness, gave force to his sympathy with art ; but I have remarked in innumerable cases, where no personal motive could exist, that he was animated by all the ardour of a maker in witnessing the display of the creative energies.

Nor was the young poet less interested by imitation, especially the imitation of action, than by the creative arts. Our theatrical representations have long been degraded by a most pernicious monopoly, by vast abuses and enormous corruptions, and by the prevalence of bad taste. Far from feeling a desire to visit the theatres, Shelley would have esteemed it a cruel infliction to have been compelled to witness performances that less fastidious critics have deemed intolerable. He found delight, however, in reading the best of our English dramas, particularly the masterpieces of Shakespeare, and he

was never weary of studying the more perfect compositions of the Attic tragedians. The lineaments of individual character may frequently be traced more certainly and more distinctly in trifles than in more important affairs ; for in the former the deportment, even of the boldest and more ingenuous, is more entirely emancipated from every restraint. I recollect many minute traits that display the inborn sympathy of a brother practitioner in the mimetic arts. One silly tale, because, in truth, it is the most trivial of all, will best illustrate the conformation of his mind ; its childishness, therefore, will be pardoned.

A young man of studious habits and of considerable talent occasionally derived a whimsical amusement, during his residence at Cambridge, from entering the public-houses in the neighbouring villages, whilst the fen-farmers and other rustics were smoking and drinking, and from repeating a short passage of a play, or a portion of an oration, which described the death of a distinguished person, the fatal result of a mighty battle,

or other important events, in a forcible manner. He selected a passage of which the language was nearly on a level with vulgar comprehension, or he adapted one by somewhat mitigating its elevation ; and, although his appearance did not bespeak histrionic gifts, he was able to utter it impressively and, what was most effective, not theatrically, but simply and with the air of a man who was in earnest ; and if he were interrupted or questioned, he could slightly modify the discourse, without materially changing the sense, to give it a further appearance of reality ; and so staid and sober was the gravity of his demeanour as to render it impossible for the clowns to solve the wonder by supposing that he was mad. During his declamation the orator feasted inwardly on the stupid astonishment of his petrified audience, and he further regaled himself afterwards by imagining the strange conjectures that would commence at his departure.

Shelley was much interested by the account I gave him of this curious fact, from the relation of two persons, who

had witnessed the performance. He asked innumerable questions, which I was in general quite unable to answer ; and he spoke of it as something altogether miraculous, that anyone should be able to recite extraordinary events in such a manner as to gain credence. As he insisted much upon the difficulty of the exploit, I told him that I thought he greatly over-estimated it, I was disposed to believe that it was in truth easy ; that faith and a certain gravity were alone needed. I had been struck by the story, when I first heard it ; and I had often thought of the practicability of imitating the deception, and although I had never proceeded so far myself, I had once or twice found it convenient to attempt something similar. At these words Shelley drew his chair close to mine, and listened with profound silence and intense curiosity.

I was walking one afternoon in the summer on the western side of that short street leading from Long Acre to Covent Garden, wherein the passenger is earnestly invited, as a personal favour

to the demandant, to proceed straightway to Highgate or to Kentish Town, and which is called, I think, James Street. I was about to enter Covent Garden, when an Irish labourer, whom I met, bearing an empty hod, accosted me somewhat roughly, and asked why I had run against him. I told him briefly that he was mistaken. Whether somebody had actually pushed the man, or he sought only to quarrel—and although he doubtless attended a weekly row regularly, and the week was already drawing to a close, he was unable to wait until Sunday for a broken head—I know not ; but he discoursed for some time with the vehemence of a man who considers himself injured or insulted, and he concluded, being emboldened by my long silence, with a cordial invitation just to push him again. Several persons, not very unlike in costume, had gathered round him, and appeared to regard him with sympathy. When he paused, I addressed to him slowly and quietly, and it should seem with great gravity, these words, as nearly as I can recollect them :—

"I have put my hand into the hamper ;
I have looked upon the sacred barley ;
I have eaten out of the drum ! I have
drunk and was well pleased ! I have said
Konx ompax, and it is finished !"

"Have you, sir ?" inquired the astonished Irishman, and his ragged friends instantly pressed round him with "Where is the hamper, Paddy?" "What barley?" and the like. And ladies from his own country—that is to say, the basket-women, suddenly began to interrogate him, "Now, I say, Pat, where have you been drinking ? What have you had ?"

I turned therefore to the right, leaving the astounded neophyte, whom I had thus planted, to expound the mystic words of initiation as he could to his inquisitive companions.

As I walked slowly under the piazzas, and through the streets and courts, towards the west, I marvelled at the ingenuity of Orpheus—if he were indeed the inventor of the Eleusinian mysteries—that he was able to devise words that, imperfectly as I had repeated them, and in the tattered fragment that has reached us, were able

to soothe people so savage and barbarous as those to whom I had addressed them, and which, as the apologists for those venerable rites affirm, were manifestly well adapted to incite persons, who hear them for the first time, however rude they may be, to ask questions. Words, that can awaken curiosity, even in the sluggish intellect of a wild man, and can thus open the inlet of knowledge!

“*Konx ompax*, and it is finished!” exclaimed Shelley, crowing with enthusiastic delight at my whimsical adventure. A thousand times, as he strode about the house, and in his rambles out of doors, would he stop and repeat aloud the mystic words of initiation, but always with an energy of manner, and a vehemence of tone and of gesture that would have prevented the ready acceptance, which a calm, passionless delivery had once procured for them. How often would he throw down his book, clasp his hands, and starting from his seat, cry suddenly, with a thrilling voice, “I have said *Konx ompax*, and it is finished!”

CHAPTER VI

AS our attention is most commonly attracted by those departments of knowledge which are striking and remarkable, rather than by those which are really useful, so, in estimating the character of an individual, we are prone to admire extraordinary intellectual powers and uncommon energies of thought, and to overlook that excellence which is, in truth, the most precious — his moral value. Was the subject of biography distinguished by a vast erudition? Was he conspicuous for an original genius? for a warm and fruitful fancy? Such are the implied questions which we seek to resolve by consulting the memoirs of his life. We may sometimes desire to be informed whether he was a man of nice honour and conspicuous integrity; but how rarely do we feel any curiosity

with respect to that quality which is, perhaps, the most important to his fellows—how seldom do we desire to measure his benevolence! It would be impossible faithfully to describe the course of a single day in the ordinary life of Shelley without showing incidentally and unintentionally, that his nature was eminently benevolent—and many minute traits, pregnant with proof, have been already scattered by the way; but it would be an injustice to his memory to forbear to illustrate expressly, but briefly, in leave-taking, the ardent, devoted, and unwearied love he bore his kind.

A personal intercourse could alone enable the observer to discern in him a soul ready winged for flight and scarcely detained by the fetters of body: that happiness was, if possible, still more indispensable to open the view of the unbounded expanse of cloudless philanthropy—pure, disinterested, and unvaried—the aspect of which often filled with mute wonder the minds of simple people, unable to estimate a penetrating genius, a docile sagacity, a tenacious memory, or,

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indeed, any of the various ornaments of the soul.

Whenever the intimate friends of Shelley speak of him in general terms, they speedily and unconsciously fall into the language of panegyric—a style of discourse that is barren of instruction, wholly devoid of interest, and justly suspected by the prudent stranger. It becomes them, therefore, on discovering the error they have committed, humbly to entreat the forgiveness of the charitable for human infirmity, oppressed and weighed down by the fulness of the subject—carefully to abstain in future from every vague expression of commendation, and faithfully to relate a plain, honest tale of unadorned facts.

A regard for children, singular and touching, is an unerring and most engaging indication of a benevolent mind. That this characteristic was not wanting in Shelley might be demonstrated by numerous examples which crowd upon the recollection, each of them bearing the strongly impressed stamp of individuality ; for genius renders every surround-

ing circumstance significant and important. In one of our rambles we were traversing the bare, squalid, ugly, corn-yielding country, that lies, if I remember rightly, to the south-west of Oxford. The hollow road ascended a hill, and near the summit Shelley observed a female child leaning against the bank on the right ; it was of a mean, dull and unattractive aspect, and older than its stunted growth denoted. The morning, as well as the preceding night, had been rainy ; it had cleared up at noon with a certain ungenial sunshine, and the afternoon was distinguished by that intense cold which sometimes, in the winter season, terminates such days. The little girl was oppressed by cold, by hunger and by a vague feeling of abandonment. It was not easy to draw from her blue lips an intelligible history of her condition. Love, however, is at once credulous and apprehensive ; and Shelley immediately decided that she had been deserted, and with his wonted precipitation (for in the career of humanity his active spirit knew no pause), he proposed different schemes for the permanent relief

of the poor foundling, and he hastily inquired which of them was the most expedient. I answered that it was desirable, in the first place, to try to procure some food, for of this the want was manifestly the most urgent. I then climbed the hill to reconnoitre, and observed a cottage close at hand, on the left of the road. With considerable difficulty—with a gentle violence indeed—Shelley induced the child to accompany him thither. After much delay, we procured from the people of the place, who resembled the dull, uncouth and perhaps sullen rustics of that district, some warm milk.

It was a strange spectacle to watch the young poet, whilst, with the enthusiastic and intensely earnest manner that characterises the legitimate brethren of the celestial art—the heaven-born and fiercely inspired sons of genuine poesy—holding the wooden bowl in one hand and the wooden spoon in the other, and kneeling on his left knee, that he might more certainly attain to her mouth. He urged and encouraged the torpid and

timid child to eat. The hot milk was agreeable to the girl, and its effects were salutary ; but she was obviously uneasy at the detention. Her uneasiness increased, and ultimately prevailed. We returned with her to the place where we had found her, Shelley bearing the bowl of milk in his hand. Here we saw some people anxiously looking for the child—a man and, I think, four women, strangers of the poorest class, of a mean but not disreputable appearance. As soon as the girl perceived them she was content, and taking the bowl from Shelley, she finished the milk without his help.

Meanwhile, one of the women explained the apparent desertion with a multitude of rapid words. They had come from a distance, and to spare the weary child the fatigue of walking farther, the day being at that time sunny, they left her to await their return. Those unforeseen delays, which harass all, and especially the poor, in transacting business, had detained them much longer than they had anticipated.

Such, in a few words, is the story which was related in many, and which the

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little girl, who, it was said, was somewhat deficient in understanding as well as in stature, was unable to explain. So humble was the condition of these poor wayfaring folks that they did not presume to offer thanks in words ; but they often turned back, and with mute wonder gazed at Shelley who, totally unconscious that he had done anything to excite surprise, returned with huge strides to the cottage to restore the bowl and to pay for the milk. As the needy travellers pursued their toilsome and possibly fruitless journey, they had at least the satisfaction to reflect that all above them were not desolated by a dreary apathy, but that some hearts were warm with that angelic benevolence towards inferiors in which still higher natures, as we are taught, largely participate.

Shelley would often pause, halting suddenly in his swift course, to admire the children of the country people ; and after gazing on a sweet and intelligent countenance, he would exhibit, in the language and with an aspect of acute anguish, his intense feeling of the future

sorrows and sufferings—of all the manifold evils of life which too often distort, by a mean and most disagreeable expression, the innocent, happy and engaging lineaments of youth. He sometimes stopped to observe the softness and simplicity that the face and gestures of a gentle girl displayed, and he would surpass her gentleness by his own.

We were strolling once in the neighbourhood of Oxford when Shelley was attracted by a little girl. He turned aside, and stood and observed her in silence. She was about six years of age, small and slight, bare-headed, bare-legged, and her apparel variegated and tattered. She was busily employed in collecting empty snail-shells, so much occupied, indeed, that some moments elapsed before she turned her face towards us. When she did so, we perceived that she was evidently a young gipsy; and Shelley was forcibly struck by the vivid intelligence of her wild and swarthy countenance, and especially by the sharp glance of her fierce black eyes. “How much intellect is here!” he exclaimed; “in how humble a

vessel, and what an unworthy occupation for a person who once knew perfectly the whole circle of the sciences ; who has forgotten them all, it is true, but who could certainly recollect them, although most probably she will never do so, will never recall a single principle of all of them ! ”

As he spoke he turned aside a bramble with his foot and discovered a large shell which the alert child instantly caught up and added to her store. At the same moment a small stone was thrown from the other side of the road ; it fell in the hedge near us. We turned round and saw on the top of a high bank a boy, some three years older than the girl, and in as rude a guise. He was looking at us over a low hedge, with a smile, but plainly not without suspicion. We might be two kidnappers, he seemed to think ; he was in charge of his little sister, and did not choose to have her stolen before his face. He gave the signal, therefore, and she obeyed it, and had almost joined him before we missed her from our side. They both disappeared, and we continued our walk.

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Shelley was charmed with the intelligence of the two children of nature, and with their marvellous wildness. He talked much about them, and compared them to birds and to the two wild leverets, which that wild mother, the hare, produces. We sauntered about, and, half an hour afterwards, on turning a corner, we suddenly met the two children again full in the face. The meeting was unlooked for, and the air of the boy showed that it was unpleasant to him. He had a large bundle of dry sticks under his arm ; these he gently dropped and stood motionless with an apprehensive smile—a deprecatory smile. We were perhaps the lords of the soil, and his patience was prepared, for patience was his lot—an inalienable inheritance long entailed upon his line—to hear a severe reproof with heavy threats, possibly even to receive blows with a stick gathered by himself not altogether unwittingly for his own back, or to find mercy and forbearance. Shelley's demeanour soon convinced him that he had nothing to fear. He laid a hand on the round, matted, knotted, bare

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and black head of each, viewed their moving, mercurial countenances with renewed pleasure and admiration, and, shaking his long locks, suddenly strode away. "That little ragged fellow knows as much as the wisest philosopher," he presently cried, clapping the wings of his soul and crowing aloud with shrill triumph at the felicitous union of the true with the ridiculous, "but he will not communicate any portion of his knowledge. It is not from churlishness, however, for of that his nature is plainly incapable ; but the sophisticated urchin will persist in thinking he has forgotten all that he knows so well. I was about to ask him myself to communicate some of the doctrines Plato unfolds in his *Dialogues* ; but I felt that it would do no good ; the rogue would have laughed at me, and so would his little sister. I wonder you did not propose to them some mathematical questions : just a few interrogations in your geometry ; for that being so plain and certain, if it be once thoroughly understood, can never be forgotten !"

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A day or two afterwards (or it might be on the morrow), as we were rambling in the favourite region at the foot of Shotover Hill, a gipsy's tent by the roadside caught Shelley's eye. Men and women were seated on the ground in front of it, watching a pot suspended over a smoky fire of sticks. He cast a passing glance at the ragged group, but immediately stopped on recognising the children, who remembered us and ran laughing into the tent. Shelley laughed also and waved his hand, and the little girl returned the salutation.

There were many striking contrasts in the character and behaviour of Shelley, and one of the most remarkable was a mixture or alternation of awkwardness with agility, of the clumsy with the graceful. He would stumble in stepping across the floor of a drawing-room; he would trip himself up on a smooth-shaven grass-plot, and he would tumble in the most inconceivable manner in ascending the commodious, facile, and well-carpeted staircase of an elegant mansion, so as to bruise his nose or his

lip on the upper steps, or to tread upon his hands, and even occasionally to disturb the composure of a well-bred footman; on the contrary, he would often glide without collision through a crowded assembly, thread with unerring dexterity a most intricate path, or securely and rapidly tread the most arduous and uncertain ways. As soon as he saw the children enter the tent he darted after them with his peculiar agility, followed them into their low, narrow and fragile tenement, penetrated to the bottom of the tent without removing his hat or striking against the woven edifice. He placed a hand on each round, rough head, spoke a few kind words to the skulking children, and then returned not less precipitously, and with as much ease and accuracy as if he had been a dweller in tents from the hour when he first drew air and milk to that day, as if he had been the descendant, not of a gentle house, but of a long line of gipsies. His visit roused the jealousy of a stunted, feeble dog, which followed him, and barked with helpless fury; he did not heed

it nor, perhaps, hear it. The company of gipsies were astonished at the first visit that had ever been made by a member of either University to their humble dwelling ; but, as its object was evidently benevolent, they did not stir or interfere, but greeted him on his return with a silent and unobserved salutation. He seized my arm, and we prosecuted our speculations as we walked briskly to our college.

The marvellous gentleness of his demeanour could conciliate the least sociable natures, and it had secretly touched the wild things which he had thus briefly noticed.

We were wandering through the roads and lanes at a short distance from the tent soon afterwards, and were pursuing our way in silence. I turned round at a sudden sound—the young gipsy had stolen upon us unperceived, and with a long bramble had struck Shelley across the skirts of his coat. He had dropped his rod, and was returning softly to the hedge.

Certain misguided persons, who, un-

happily for themselves, were incapable of understanding the true character of Shelley, have published many false and injurious calumnies respecting him—some for hire, others drawing largely out of the inborn vulgarity of their own minds, or from the necessary malignity of ignorance—but no one ever ventured to say that he was not a good judge of an orange. At this time, in his nineteenth year, although temperate, he was less abstemious in his diet than he afterwards became, and he was frequently provided with some fine samples. As soon as he understood the rude but friendly welcome to the heaths and lanes, he drew an orange from his pocket and rolled it after the retreating gipsy along the grass by the side of the wide road. The boy started with surprise as the golden fruit passed him, quickly caught it up and joyfully bore it away, bending reverently over it and carrying it with both his hands, as if, together with almost the size, it had also the weight of a cannon-ball.

His passionate fondness of the Platonic

philosophy seemed to sharpen his natural affection for children, and his sympathy with their innocence. Every true Platonist, he used to say, must be a lover of children, for they are our masters and instructors in philosophy. The mind of a new-born infant, so far from being, as Locke affirms, a sheet of blank paper, is a pocket edition containing every dialogue, a complete Elzevir Plato, if we can fancy such a pleasant volume, and moreover a perfect encyclopedia, comprehending not only the newest discoveries, but all those still more valuable and wonderful inventions that will hereafter be made.

One Sunday we had been reading Plato together so diligently that the usual hour of exercise passed away unperceived. We sallied forth hastily to take the air for half an hour before dinner. In the middle of Magdalen Bridge we met a woman with a child in her arms. Shelley was more attentive at that instant to our conduct in a life that was past or to come than to a decorous regulation of the present, according to the established

usages of society in that fleeting moment of eternal duration styled the nineteenth century. With abrupt dexterity he caught hold of the child. The mother, who might well fear that it was about to be thrown over the parapet of the bridge into the sedgy waters below, held it fast by its long train.

"Will your baby tell us anything about pre-existence, madam?" he asked, in a piercing voice and with a wistful look.

The mother made no answer, but, perceiving that Shelley's object was not murderous but altogether harmless, she dismissed her apprehension and relaxed her hold.

"Will your baby tell us anything about pre-existence, madam?" he repeated, with unabated earnestness.

"He cannot speak, sir," said the mother, seriously.

"Worse and worse," cried Shelley, with an air of deep disappointment, shaking his long hair most pathetically about his young face; "but surely the babe can speak if he will, for he is only a few

weeks old. He may fancy, perhaps, that he cannot, but it is only a silly whim. He cannot have forgotten entirely the use of speech in so short a time. The thing is absolutely impossible ! ”

“ It is not for me to dispute with you, gentlemen,” the woman meekly replied, her eye glancing at our academical garb, “ but I can safely declare that I never heard him speak, nor any child, indeed, of his age.”

It was a fine, placid boy : so far from being disturbed by the interruption, he looked up and smiled. Shelley pressed his fat cheeks with his fingers ; we commended his healthy appearance and his equanimity, and the mother was permitted to proceed, probably to her satisfaction, for she would doubtless prefer a less speculative nurse. Shelley sighed deeply as we walked on.

“ How provokingly close are those newborn babes ! ” he ejaculated ; “ but it is not the less certain, notwithstanding the cunning attempts to conceal the truth, that all knowledge is reminiscence. The doctrine is far more ancient than the

times of Plato, and as old as the venerable allegory that the Muses are the daughters of Memory ; not one of the nine was ever said to be the child of Invention ! ”

In consequence of this theory, upon which his active imagination loved to dwell, and which he was delighted to maintain in argument with the few persons qualified to dispute with him on the higher metaphysics, his fondness for children—a fondness innate in generous minds—was augmented and elevated, and the gentle instinct expanded into a profound and philosophical sentiment. The Platonists have been illustrious in all ages on account of the strength and permanence of their attachments. In Shelley the parental affections were developed at an early period to an unusual extent. It was manifest, therefore, that his heart was formed by nature and by cultivation to derive the most exquisite gratification from the society of his own progeny, or the most poignant anguish from a natural or unnatural bereavement. To strike him here was the cruel admonition

which a cursory glance would at once convey to him who might seek where to wound him most severely with a single blow, should he ever provoke the vengeance of an enemy to the active and fearless spirit of liberal investigation and to all solid learning—of a foe to the human race. With respect to the theory of the pre-existence of the soul, it is not wonderful that an ardent votary of the intellectual should love to uphold it in strenuous and protracted disputation, as it places the immortality of the soul in an impregnable castle, and not only secures it an existence independent of the body, as it were, by usage and prescription, but moreover, raising it out of the dirt on tall stilts, elevates it far above the mud of matter.

It is not wonderful that a subtle sophist, who esteemed above all riches and terrene honours victory in well-fought debate, should be willing to maintain a dogma that is not only of difficult eversion by those who, struggling as mere metaphysicians, use no other weapon than unassisted reason, but which

one of the most illustrious Fathers of the Church—a man of amazing powers and stupendous erudition, armed with the prodigious resources of the Christian theology, the renowned Origen—was unable to dismiss ; retaining it as not dissonant from his informed reason, and as affording a larger scope for justice in the moral government of the universe.

In addition to his extreme fondness for children, another and a not less unequivocal characteristic of a truly philanthropic mind was eminently and still more remarkably conspicuous in Shelley—his admiration of men of learning and genius. In truth the devotion, the reverence, the religion with which he was kindled towards all the masters of intellect, cannot be described, and must be utterly inconceivable to minds less deeply enamoured with the love of wisdom. The irreverent many cannot comprehend the awe, the careless apathetic worldling cannot imagine the enthusiasm, nor can the tongue that attempts only to speak of things visible to the bodily eye, express the mighty motion that inwardly agitated

him when he approached, for the first time, a volume which he believed to be replete with the recondite and mystic philosophy of antiquity ; his cheeks glowed, his eyes became bright, his whole frame trembled, and his entire attention was immediately swallowed up in the depths of contemplation. The rapid and vigorous conversion of his soul to intellect can only be compared with the instantaneous ignition and combustion which dazzle the sight, when a bundle of dry reeds or other inflammable substance is thrown upon a fire already rich with accumulated heat.

The company of persons of merit was delightful to him, and he often spoke with a peculiar warmth of the satisfaction he hoped to derive from the society of the most distinguished literary and scientific characters of the day in England, and the other countries of Europe, when his own attainments would justify him in seeking their acquaintance. He was never weary of recounting the rewards and favours that authors had formerly received ; and he would detail

in pathetic language, and with a touching earnestness, the instances of that poverty and neglect which an iron age assigned as the fitting portion of solid erudition and undoubted talents. He would contrast the niggard praise and the paltry payments that the cold and wealthy moderns reluctantly dole out, with the ample and heartfelt commendation and the noble remuneration which were freely offered by the more generous but less opulent ancients. He spoke with an animation of gesture and an elevation of voice of him who undertook a long journey, that he might once see the historian Livy; and he recounted the rich legacies which were bequeathed to Cicero and Pliny the younger by testators venerating their abilities and attainments — his zeal, enthusiastic in the cause of letters, giving an interest and a novelty to the most trite and familiar instances. His disposition being wholly munificent, gentle and friendly, how generous a patron would he have proved had he ever been in the actual possession of even moderate wealth!

Out of a scanty and somewhat precarious income, inadequate to allow the indulgence of the most ordinary superfluities, and diminished by various casual but unavoidable incumbrances, he was able, by restricting himself to a diet more simple than the fare of the most austere anchorite, and by refusing himself horses and the other gratifications that appear properly to belong to his station, and of which he was in truth very fond, to bestow upon men of letters, whose merits were of too high an order to be rightly estimated by their own generation, donations large indeed, if we consider from how narrow a source they flowed.

But to speak of this, his signal and truly admirable bounty, save only in the most distant manner and the most general terms, would be a flagrant violation of that unequalled delicacy with which it was extended to undeserved indigence, accompanied by well-founded and most commendable pride. To allude to any particular instance, however obscurely and indistinctly, would be unpardonable; but it would be scarcely less blameable to

dismiss the consideration of the character of the benevolent young poet without some imperfect testimony of this rare excellence.

That he gave freely, when the needy scholar asked or in silent, hopeless poverty seemed to ask his aid, will be demonstrated most clearly by relating shortly one example of his generosity, where the applicant had no pretensions to literary renown, and no claim whatever, except perhaps honest penury. It is delightful to attempt to delineate from various points of view a creature of infinite moral beauty, but one instance must suffice ; an ample volume might be composed of such tales, but one may be selected because it contains a large admixture of that ingredient which is essential to the conversion of almsgiving into the genuine virtue of charity—self-denial.

On returning to town after the long vacation at the end of October, I found Shelley at one of the hotels in Covent Garden. Having some business in hand he was passing a few days there alone.

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We had taken some mutton chops hastily at a dark place in one of the minute courts of the city at an early hour, and we went forth to walk ; for to walk at all times, and especially in the evening, was his supreme delight.

The aspect of the fields to the north of Somers Town, between that beggarly suburb and Kentish Town, has been totally changed of late. Although this district could never be accounted pretty, nor deserving a high place even amongst suburban scenes, yet the air, or often the wind, seemed pure and fresh to captives emerging from the smoke of London. There were certain old elms, much very green grass, quiet cattle feeding and groups of noisy children playing with something of the freedom of the village green. There was, oh blessed thing ! an entire absence of carriages and of blood-horses ; of the dust and dress and affectation and fashion of the parks ; there were, moreover, old and quaint edifices and objects which gave character to the scene.

Whenever Shelley was imprisoned in

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London — for to a poet a close and crowded city must be a dreary gaol—his steps would take that direction, unless his residence was too remote, or he was accompanied by one who chose to guide his walk. On this occasion I was led thither, as indeed I had anticipated. The weather was fine, but the autumn was already advanced ; we had not sauntered long in these fields when the dusky evening closed in, and the darkness gradually thickened.

“How black those trees are,” said Shelley, stopping short and pointing to a row of elms. “It is so dark the trees might well be houses and the turf pavement—the eye would sustain no loss. It is useless, therefore, to remain here ; let us return.” He proposed tea at his hotel, I assented ; and hastily buttoning his coat he seized my arm and set off at his great pace, striding with bent knees over the fields and through the narrow streets. We were crossing the New Road, when he said shortly, “I must call for a moment, but it will not be out of the way at all,” and

then dragged me suddenly towards the left. I inquired whither we were bound, and, I believe, I suggested the postponement of the intended call till the morrow. He answered, it was not at all out of our way.

I was hurried along rapidly towards the left. We soon fell into an animated discussion respecting the nature of the virtue of the Romans, which in some measure beguiled the weary way. Whilst he was talking with much vehemence and a total disregard of the people who thronged the streets, he suddenly wheeled about and pushed me through a narrow door; to my infinite surprise I found myself in a pawnbroker's shop. It was in the neighbourhood of Newgate Street, for he had no idea whatever, in practice, either of time or space, nor did he in any degree regard method in the conduct of business.

There were several women in the shop in brown and grey cloaks, with squalling children. Some of them were attempting to persuade the children to be quiet, or at least to scream with moderation; the

others were enlarging upon and pointing out the beauties of certain coarse and dirty sheets that lay before them to a man on the other side of the counter.

I bore this substitute for our proposed tea some minutes with tolerable patience, but as the call did not promise to terminate speedily, I said to Shelley, in a whisper, "Is not this almost as bad as the Roman virtue?" Upon this he approached the pawnbroker; it was long before he could obtain a hearing, and he did not find civility. The man was unwilling to part with a valuable pledge so soon, or perhaps he hoped to retain it eventually; or it might be that the obliquity of his nature disqualified him for respectful behaviour.

A pawnbroker is frequently an important witness in criminal proceedings. It has happened to me, therefore, afterwards to see many specimens of this kind of banker. They sometimes appeared not less respectable than other tradesmen, and sometimes I have been forcibly reminded of the first I ever met with, by an equally ill-conditioned fellow. I

was so little pleased with the introduction that I stood aloof in the shop, and did not hear what passed between him and Shelley.

On our way to Covent Garden I expressed my surprise and dissatisfaction at our strange visit, and I learned that when he came to London before, in the course of the summer, some old man had related to him a tale of distress—of a calamity which could only be alleviated by the timely application of ten pounds ; five of them he drew at once from his pocket, and to raise the other five he had pawned his beautiful solar microscope ! He related this act of beneficence simply and briefly, as if it were a matter of course, and such indeed it was to him. I was ashamed at my impatience, and we strode along in silence.

It was past ten when we reached the hotel. Some excellent tea and a liberal supply of hot muffins in the coffee-room, now quiet and solitary, were the more grateful after the wearisome delay and vast deviation. Shelley often turned his head and cast eager glances towards the

door, and whenever the waiter replenished our tea-pot or approached our box he was interrogated whether anyone had yet called.

At last the desired summons was brought. Shelley drew forth some bank-notes, hurried to the bar, and returned as hastily, bearing in triumph under his arm a mahogany box, followed by the officious waiter, with whose assistance he placed it upon the bench by his side. He viewed it often with evident satisfaction, and sometimes patted it affectionately in the course of calm conversation. The solar microscope was always a favourite plaything or instrument of scientific inquiry. Whenever he entered a house his first care was to choose some window of a southern aspect, and, if permission could be obtained by prayer or by purchase, straightway to cut a hole through the shutter to receive it.

His regard for his solar microscope was as lasting as it was strong; for he retained it several years after this adventure, and long after he had parted with all the rest of his philosophical apparatus.

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Such is the story of the microscope, and no rightly judging person who hears it will require the further accumulation of proofs of a benevolent heart ; nor can I, perhaps, better close this sketch than with that impression of the pure and genial beauty of Shelley's nature which this simple anecdote will bequeath.

CHAPTER VII

THE theory of civil liberty has ever seemed lovely to the eyes of a young man enamoured of moral and intellectual beauty. Shelley's devotion to freedom, therefore, was ardent and sincere. He would have submitted with cheerful alacrity to the greatest sacrifices, had they been demanded of him, to advance the sacred cause of liberty ; and he would have gallantly encountered every peril in the fearless resistance to active oppression. Nevertheless, in ordinary times, although a generous and unhesitating patriot, he was little inclined to consume the pleasant season of youth amidst the intrigues and clamours of elections, and in the dull and selfish cabals of parties. His fancy viewed from a lofty eminence the grand scheme of an ideal republic ; and he could not descend

to the humble task of setting out the boundaries of neighbouring rights, and to the uninviting duties of actual administration. He was still less disposed to interest himself in the politics of the day because he observed the pernicious effects of party zeal in a field where it ought not to enter.

It is no slight evil, but a heavy price paid for popular institutions, that society should be divided into hostile clans to serve the selfish purposes of a few political adventurers; and surely to introduce politics within the calm precincts of a University ought to be deemed a capital offence—a felony without benefit of clergy. The undue admission (to borrow the language of Universities for a moment) is not less fatal to its existence as an institution designed for the advancement of learning, than the reception of the wooden horse within the walls of Troy was to the safety of that renowned city.

What does it import the interpreters of Pindar and Thucydides, the expositors of Plato and Aristotle, if a few

interested persons, for the sake of some lucrative posts, affect to believe that it is a matter of vital importance to the state to concede certain privileges to the Roman Catholics ; whilst others, for the same reason, pretend with tears in their eyes that the concessions would be dangerous and indeed destructive, and shudder with feigned horror at the harmless proposal ? Such pretexts may be advantageous and perhaps even honourable to the ingenious persons who use them for the purposes of immediate advancement ; but of what concernment are they to Apollo and the Muses ? How could the Catholic question augment the calamities of Priam, or diminish the misfortunes of the ill-fated house of Labdacus ? or which of the doubts of the ancient philosophers would the most satisfactory solution of it remove ? Why must the modest student come forth and dance upon the tight-rope, with the mountebanks, since he is to receive no part of the reward, and would not emulate the glory of those meritorious artists ? Yet did this most

inapplicable question mainly contribute to poison the harmless and studious felicity which we enjoyed at Oxford.

During the whole period of our residence there the University was cruelly disfigured by bitter feuds, arising out of the late election of its Chancellor ; in an especial manner was our own most venerable college deformed by them, and by angry and senseless disappointment.

Lord Grenville had just been chosen. There could be no more comparison between his scholarship and his various qualifications for the honourable and useless office, and the claims of his unsuccessful opponent, than between the attainments of the best man of the year and those of the huge porter, who with a stern and solemn civility kept the gates of University College—the arts of mulled-wine and egg-hot being, in the latter case, alone excepted.

The vanquished competitor, however, most unfortunately for its honour and character, was a member of our college ; and in proportion as the intrinsic merits of our rulers were small, had the

vehemence and violence of electioneering been great, that, through the abuse of the patronage of the church, they might attain to those dignities as the rewards of the activity of partisans, which they could never hope to reach through the legitimate road of superior learning and talents.

Their vexation at failing was the more sharp and abiding, because the only objection that vulgar bigotry could urge against the victor was his disposition to make concessions to the Roman Catholics ; and every dull lampoon about popes and cardinals and the scarlet lady had accordingly been worn threadbare in vain. Since the learned and liberal had conquered, learning and liberality were peculiarly odious with us at that epoch. The studious scholar, particularly if he were of an inquiring disposition, and of a bold and free temper, was suspected and disliked ; he was one of the enemy's troops. The inert and the subservient were the loyal soldiers of the legitimate army of the faith. The despised and scattered nation of scholars is commonly

unfortunate ; but a more severe calamity has seldom befallen the remnant of true Israelites than to be led captive by such a generation ! Youth is happy, because it is blithe and healthful and exempt from care ; but it is doubly and trebly happy, since it is honest and fearless, honourable and disinterested.

In the whole body of undergraduates, scarcely one was friendly to the holder of the loaves and the promiser of the fishes—Lord Eldon. All were eager—all, one and all—in behalf of the scholar and the Liberal statesman ; and plain and loud was the avowal of their sentiments. A sullen demeanour towards the young rebels displayed the annoyance arising from the want of success and from our lack of sympathy, and it would have demonstrated to the least observant that, where the Muses dwell, the quarrels and intrigues of political parties ought not to come.

By his family and his connections, as well as by disposition, Shelley was attached to the successful side ; and although it was manifest that he was a

youth of an admirable temper, of rare talents and unwearied industry, and likely, therefore, to shed a lustre upon his college and the University itself, yet, as he was eminently delighted at that wherewith his superiors were offended, he was regarded from the beginning with a jealous eye. A young man of spirit will despise the mean spite of sordid minds ; nevertheless the persecution which a generous soul can condemn, through frequent repetition too often becomes a severe annoyance in the long course of life, and Shelley frequently and most pathetically lamented the political divisions which then harassed the University, and were a more fertile source of manifold ills in the wider field of active life. For this reason did he appear to cling more closely to our sweet, studious seclusion ; and from this cause, perhaps, principally arose his disinclination—I may say, indeed, his intense antipathy—for the political career that had been proposed to him. A lurking suspicion would sometimes betray itself that he was to be forced into that path, and impressed

into the civil service of the state, to become, as it were, a conscript legislator.

A newspaper never found its way to his rooms the whole period of his residence at Oxford ; but when waiting in a bookseller's shop or at an inn he would sometimes, although rarely, permit his eye to be attracted by a murder or a storm. Having perused the tale of wonder or of horror, if it chanced to stray to a political article, after reading a few lines he invariably threw it aside to a great distance ; and he started from his seat his face flushing, and strode about muttering broken sentences, the purport of which was always the same : his extreme dissatisfaction at the want of candour and fairness, and the monstrous disingenuousness which politicians manifest in speaking of the characters and measures of their rivals. Strangers, who caught imperfectly the sense of his indistinct murmurs, were often astonished at the vehemence of his mysterious displeasure.

Once I remember a bookseller, the master of a very small shop in a little

country town, but apparently a sufficiently intelligent man, could not refrain from expressing his surprise that anyone should be offended with proceedings that seemed to him as much in the ordinary course of trade, and as necessary to its due exercise, as the red ligature of the bundle of quills, or the thin and pale brown wrapper which enclosed the quire of letter paper we had just purchased of him.

A man of talents and learning, who refused to enlist under the banners of any party and did not deign to inform himself of the politics of the day, or to take the least part or interest in them, would be a noble and a novel spectacle ; but so many persons hope to profit by dissensions, that the merits of such a steady lover of peace would not be duly appreciated, either by the little provincial bookseller or the other inhabitants of our turbulent country.

The ordinary lectures in our college were of much shorter duration, and decidedly less difficult and less instructive than the lessons we had received in

the higher classes of a public school ; nor were our written exercises more stimulating than the oral. Certain compositions were required at stated periods ; but, however excellent they might be, they were never commended ; however deficient, they were never censured ; and, being altogether unnoticed, there was no reason to suppose that they were ever read.

The University at large was not less remiss than each college in particular ; the only incitement proposed was an examination at the end of four years. The young collegian might study in private, as diligently as he would, at Oxford as in every other place ; and if he chose to submit his pretensions to the examiners, his name was set down in the first, the second or the third class—if I mistake not, there were three divisions—according to his advancement. This list was printed precisely at the moment when he quitted the University for ever ; a new generation of strangers might read the names of the unknown proficient, if they would.

It was notorious, moreover, that, merely to obtain the academical degrees, every new-comer, who had passed through a tolerable grammar-school, brought with him a stock of learning, of which the residuum that had not evaporated during four years of dissipation and idleness, would be more than sufficient.

The languid course of chartered laziness was ill suited to the ardent activity and glowing zeal of Shelley. Since those persons, who were hired at an enormous charge by his own family and by the State to find due and beneficial employment for him, thought fit to neglect this, their most sacred duty, he began forthwith to set himself to work. He read diligently—I should rather say he devoured greedily, with the voracious appetite of a famished man—the authors that roused his curiosity; he discoursed and discussed with energy; he wrote, he began to print and he designed soon to publish various works.

He begins betimes who begins to instruct mankind at eighteen. The judicious will probably be of opinion that

in eighteen years man can scarcely learn how to learn ; and that for eighteen more years he ought to be content to learn ; and if, at the end of the second period, he still thinks that he can impart anything worthy of attention, it is, at least, early enough to begin to teach. The fault, however, if it were a fault, was to be imputed to the times, and not to the individual, as the numerous precocious effusions of the day attest.

Shelley was quick to conceive, and not less quick to execute. When I called one morning at one, I found him busily occupied with some proofs, which he continued to correct and re-correct with anxious care. As he was wholly absorbed in this occupation, I selected a book from the floor, where there was always a good store, and read in silence for at least an hour.

My thoughts being as completely abstracted as those of my companion, he startled me by suddenly throwing a paper with some force on the middle of the table, and saying, in a penetrating whisper, as he sprang eagerly from his chair, "I am going to publish some poems."

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In answer to my inquiries, he put the proofs into my hands. I read them twice attentively, for the poems were very short ; and I told him there were some good lines, some bright thoughts, but there were likewise many irregularities and incongruities. I added that correctness was important in all compositions, but it constituted the essence of short ones ; and that it surely would be imprudent to bring his little book out so hastily ; and then I pointed out the errors and defects.

He listened in silence with much attention, and did not dispute what I said, except that he remarked faintly that it would not be known that he was the author, and therefore the publication could not do him any harm.

I answered that, although it might not be disadvantageous to be the unknown author of an unread work, it certainly could not be beneficial.

He made no reply ; and we immediately went out, and strolled about the public walks.

We dined and returned to his rooms, where we conversed on different subjects. He did not mention his poems, but they occupied his thoughts; for he did not fall asleep as usual. Whilst we were at tea, he said abruptly, "I think you disparage my poems. Tell me what you dislike in them, for I have forgotten."

I took the proofs from the place where I had left them, and looking over them, repeated the former objections, and suggested others. He acquiesced; and, after a pause, asked, might they be altered? I assented.

"I will alter them."

"It will be better to re-write them; a short poem should be of the first impression."

Some time afterwards he anxiously inquired, "But in their present form you do not think they ought to be published?"

I had been looking over the proofs again, and I answered, "Only as burlesque poetry;" and I read a part, changing it a little here and there.

He laughed at the parody, and begged I would repeat it.

I took a pen and altered it ; and he then read it aloud several times in a ridiculous tone, and was amused by it. His mirth consoled him for the condemnation of his verses, and the intention of publishing them was abandoned.

The proofs lay in his rooms for some days, and we occasionally amused ourselves during an idle moment by making them more and more ridiculous ; by striking out the more sober passages ; by inserting whimsical conceits, and especially by giving them what we called a dithyrambic character, which was effected by cutting some lines out, and joining the different parts together that would agree in construction, but were the most discordant in sense.

Although Shelley was of a grave disposition, he had a certain sly relish for a practical joke, so that it were ingenuous and abstruse and of a literary nature. He would often exult in the successful forgeries of Chatterton and Ireland ; and he was especially delighted with a trick

that had lately been played at Oxford by a certain noble viceroy, at that time an undergraduate, respecting the fairness of which the University was divided in opinion, all the undergraduates accounting it most just, and all the graduates, and especially the bachelors, extremely iniquitous, and indeed popish and jesuitical. A reward is offered annually for the best English essay on a subject proposed: the competitors send their anonymous essays, each being distinguished by a motto; when the grave arbitrators have selected the most worthy, they burn the vanquished essays, and open the sealed paper endorsed with a corresponding motto, and containing the name of the victor.

On the late famous contention, all the ceremonies had been duly performed, but the sealed paper presented the name of an undergraduate, who was not qualified to be a candidate, and all the less meritorious discourses of the bachelors had been burnt, together with their sealed papers—so there was to be no bachelor's prize that year.

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When we had conferred a competent absurdity upon the proofs, we amused ourselves by proposing, but without the intention of executing our project, divers ludicrous titles for the work. Sometimes we thought of publishing it in the name of some one of the chief living poets, or possibly of one of the graver authorities of the day ; and we regaled ourselves by describing his wrathful renunciations, and his astonishment at finding himself immortalised, without his knowledge and against his will : the inability to die could not be more disagreeable even to Tithonus himself ; but how were we to handcuff our ungrateful favourite, that he might not tear off the unfading laurel which we were to place upon his brow ? I hit upon a title at last, to which the pre-eminence was given, and we inscribed it upon the cover. A mad washerwoman, named Peg Nicholson, had attempted to stab the king, George the Third, with a carving-knife ; the story has long been forgotten, but it was then fresh in the recollection of every one ; it was proposed that we should ascribe the poems to her.

The poor woman was still living, and in green vigour within the walls of Bedlam ; but since her existence must be uncomfortable, there could be no harm in putting her to death, and in creating a nephew and administrator to be the editor of his aunt's poetical works.

The idea gave an object and purpose to our burlesque—to ridicule the strange mixture of sentimentality with the murderous fury of the revolutionists, that was so prevalent in the compositions of the day ; and the proofs were altered again to adapt them to this new scheme, but still without any notion of publication. When the bookseller called to ask for the proof, Shelley told him that he had changed his mind, and showed them to him.

The man was so much pleased with the whimsical conceit that he asked to be permitted to publish the book on his own account ; promising inviolable secrecy, and as many copies *gratis* as might be required : after some hesitation, permission was granted, upon the plighted honour of the trade.

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In a few days, or rather in a few hours, a noble quarto appeared ; it consisted of a small number of pages, it is true, but they were of the largest size, of the thickest, the whitest and the smoothest drawing paper ; a large, clear and handsome type had impressed a few lines with ink of a rich, glossy black, amidst ample margins. The poor maniac laundress was gravely styled "the late Mrs Margaret Nicholson, widow ;" and the sonorous name of Fitzvictor had been culled for her inconsolable nephew and administrator. To add to his dignity, the waggish printer had picked up some huge text types of so unusual a form that even an antiquary could not spell the words at the first glance. The effect was certainly striking ; Shelley had torn open the large square bundle before the printer's boy quitted the room, and holding out a copy with both his hands, he ran about in an ecstasy of delight, gazing at the superb title-page.

The first poem was a long one, condemning war in the lump — puling trash, that might have been written by

a Quaker, and could only have been published in sober sadness by a society instituted for the diffusion of that kind of knowledge which they deemed useful—useful for some end which they have not been pleased to reveal, and which unassisted reason is wholly unable to discover. The MS. had been confided to Shelley by some rhymester of the day, and it was put forth in this shape to astonish a weak mind ; but principally to captivate the admirers of philosophical poetry by the manifest incongruity of disallowing all war, even the most just, and then turning sharp round, and recommending the dagger of the assassin as the best cure for all evils, and the sure passport to a lady's favour.

Our book of useful knowledge—the philosopher's own book — contained sundry odes and other pieces, professing an ardent attachment to freedom, and proposing to stab all who were less enthusiastic than the supposed authoress. The work, however, was altered a little, I believe, before the final impression ; but I never read it afterwards, for, when

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an author once sees his book in print, his task is ended, and he may fairly leave the perusal of it to posterity. I have one copy, if not more, somewhere or other, but not at hand. There were some verses, I remember, with a good deal about sucking in them; to these I objected, as unsuitable to the gravity of a University, but Shelley declared they would be the most impressive of all. There was a poem concerning a young woman, one Charlotte Somebody, who attempted to assassinate Robespierre, or some such person; and there was to have been a rapturous monologue to the dagger of Brutus. The composition of such a piece was no mean effort of the Muse. It was completed at last, but not in time; as the dagger itself has probably fallen a prey to rust, so the more pointed and polished monologue, it is to be feared, has also perished through a more culpable neglect.

A few copies were sent, as a special favour, to trusty and sagacious friends at a distance, whose gravity would not permit them to suspect a hoax. They

read and admired, being charmed with the wild notes of liberty. Some, indeed, presumed to censure mildly certain passages as having been thrown off in too bold a vein. Nor was a certain success wanting—the remaining copies were rapidly sold in Oxford at the aristocratical price of half-a-crown for half-a-dozen pages. We used to meet gownsmen in High Street reading the goodly volume as they walked—pensive, with a grave and sage delight—some of them, perhaps, more pensive because it seemed to portend the instant overthrow of all royalty from a king to a court card.

What a strange delusion to admire our stuff—the concentrated essence of nonsense! It was indeed a kind of fashion to be seen reading it in public, as a mark of a nice discernment, of a delicate and fastidious taste in poetry, and the very criterion of a choice spirit.

Nobody suspected, or could suspect, who was the author. The thing passed off as the genuine production of the would-be regicide. It is marvellous, in truth, how little talent of any kind there

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was in our famous University in those days ; there was no great encouragement, however, to display intellectual gifts.

The acceptance, as a serious poem, of a work so evidently designed for a burlesque upon the prevailing notion of the day, that revolutionary ruffians were the most fit recipients of the gentlest passions, was a foretaste of the prodigious success that, a few years later, attended a still more whimsical paradox. Poets had sung already that human ties put love at once to flight ; that at the sight of civil obligations he spreads his light wings in a moment and makes default. The position was soon greatly extended, and we were taught by a noble poet that even the slightest recognition of the law of nations was fatal to the tender passion. The very captain of a privateer was pronounced incapable of a pure and ardent attachment ; the feeble control of letters of marque could effectually check the course of affection ; a complete union of souls could only be accomplished under the black flag. Your true

lover must necessarily be an enemy of the whole human race—a mere and absolute pirate. It is true that the tales of the love-sick buccaneers were adorned with no ordinary talent, but the theory is not less extraordinary on that account.

The operation of Peg Nicholson was bland and innoxious. The next work that Shelley printed was highly deleterious, and was destined to shed a baneful influence over his future progress. In itself it was more harmless than the former, but it was turned to a deadly poison by the unprovoked malice of fortune.

We had read together attentively several of the metaphysical works that were most in vogue at that time, as Locke *Concerning Human Understanding*, and Hume's *Essays*, particularly the latter, of which we had made a very careful analysis, as was customary with those who read the *Ethics* and the other treatises of Aristotle for their degree. Shelley had the custody of these papers, which were chiefly in his handwriting,

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although they were the joint production of both in our common daily studies. From these, and from a small part of them only, he made up a little book, and had it printed, I believe, in the country, certainly not at Oxford. His motive was this. He not only read greedily all the controversial writings on subjects interesting to him which he could procure, and disputed vehemently in conversation with his friends, but he had several correspondents with whom he kept up the ball of doubt in letters; of these he received many, so that the arrival of the postman was always an anxious moment with him. This practice he had learned of a physician, from whom he had taken instructions in chemistry, and of whose character and talents he often spoke with profound veneration. It was, indeed, the usual course with men of learning formerly, as their biographies and many volumes of such epistles testify. The physician was an old man, and a man of the old school. He confined his epistolary discussions to matters of science, and so did his disciple

for some time ; but when metaphysics usurped the place in his affections that chemistry had before held, the latter gradually fell into disceptions, respecting existences still more subtle than gases and the electric fluid. The transition, however, from physics to metaphysics was gradual. Is the electric fluid material? he would ask his correspondent ; is light—is the vital principle in vegetables—in brutes—is the human soul?

His individual character had proved an obstacle to his inquiries, even whilst they were strictly physical. A refuted or irritated chemist had suddenly concluded a long correspondence by telling his youthful opponent that he would write to his master, and have him well flogged. The discipline of a public school, however salutary in other respects, was not favourable to free and fair discussions, and Shelley began to address inquiries anonymously, or rather, that he might receive an answer, as Philalethes, and the like ; but, even at Eton, the postmen do not ordinarily speak Greek. To prevent miscarriages, therefore it was necessary

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to adopt a more familiar name, as John Short or Thomas Long.

When he came to Oxford, he retained and extended his former practice without quitting the convenient disguise of an assumed name. His object in printing the short abstract of some of the doctrines of Hume was to facilitate his epistolary disquisitions. It was a small pill, but it worked powerfully. The mode of operation was this: he enclosed a copy in a letter and sent it by the post, stating, with modesty and simplicity, that he had met accidentally with that little tract, which appeared unhappily to be quite unanswerable. Unless the fish was too sluggish to take the bait, an answer of refutation was forwarded to an appointed address in London, and then, in a vigorous reply, he would fall upon the unwary disputant and break his bones. The strenuous attack sometimes provoked a rejoinder more carefully prepared, and an animated and protracted debate ensued. The party cited, having put in his answer, was fairly in court, and he might get out of it as he could. The

chief difficulty seemed to be to induce the person addressed to acknowledge the jurisdiction, and to plead ; and this, Shelley supposed, would be removed by sending, in the first instance, a printed syllabus instead of written arguments. An accident greatly facilitated his object. We had been talking some time before about geometrical demonstration ; he was repeating its praises, which he had lately read in some mathematical work, and speaking of its absolute certainty and perfect truth.

I said that this superiority partly arose from the confidence of mathematicians, who were naturally a confident race, and were seldom acquainted with any other science than their own ; that they always put a good face upon the matter, detailing their arguments dogmatically and doggedly, as if there was no room for doubt, and concluded, when weary of talking in their positive strain, with Q.E.D. : in which three letters there was so powerful a charm, that there was no instance of anyone having ever disputed any argument or proposition to

which they were subscribed. He was diverted by this remark, and often repeated it, saying, if you ask a friend to dinner, and only put Q.E.D. at the end of the invitation, he cannot refuse to come; and he sometimes wrote these letters at the end of a common note, in order, as he said, to attain to a mathematical certainty. The potent characters were not forgotten when he printed his little syllabus; and their efficacy in rousing his antagonists was quite astonishing.

It is certain that the three obnoxious letters had a fertilising effect, and raised crops of controversy; but it would be unjust to deny that an honest zeal stimulated divers worthy men to assert the truth against an unknown assailant. The praise of good intention must be conceded; but it is impossible to accord that of powerful execution also to his antagonists; this curious correspondence fully testified the deplorable condition of education at that time. A youth of eighteen was able to confute men who had numbered thrice as many years; to

vanquish them on their own ground, although he gallantly fought at a disadvantage by taking the wrong side.

His little pamphlet was never offered for sale ; it was not addressed to an ordinary reader, but to the metaphysician alone, and it was so short, that it was only designed to point out the line of argument. It was, in truth, a general issue, a compendious denial of every allegation, in order to put the whole case in proof ; it was a formal mode of saying you affirm so and so, then prove it, and thus was it understood by his more candid and intelligent correspondents. As it was shorter, so was it plainer, and, perhaps in order to provoke discussion, a little bolder, than Hume's *Essays*—a book which occupies a conspicuous place in the library of every student. The doctrine, if it deserves the name, was precisely similar ; the necessary and inevitable consequence of Locke's philosophy, and of the theory that all knowledge is from without. I will not admit your conclusions, his opponent might answer ; then you must deny those of

Hume ; I deny them ; but you must deny those of Locke also, and we will go back together to Plato. Such was the usual course of argument. Sometimes, however, he rested on mere denial, holding his adversary to strict proof, and deriving strength from his weakness.

The young Platonist argued thus negatively through the love of argument, and because he found a noble joy in the fierce shocks of contending minds. He loved truth, and sought it everywhere and at all hazards frankly and boldly, like a man who deserved to find it ; but he also loved dearly victory in debate, and warm debate for its own sake. Never was there a more unexceptionable disputant ; he was eager beyond the most ardent, but never angry and never personal ; he was the only arguer I ever knew who drew every argument from the nature of the thing, and who could never be provoked to descend to personal contentions. He was fully inspired, indeed, with the whole spirit of the true logician ; the more obvious and indisputable the proposition which his opponent under-

took to maintain, the more complete was the triumph of his art if he could refute and prevent him.

To one who was acquainted with the history of our University, with its ancient reputation as the most famous school of logic, it seemed that the genius of the place, after an absence of several generations, had deigned to return at last; the visit, however, as it soon appeared, was ill-timed.

The schoolman of old, who occasionally laboured with technical subtleties to prevent the admission of the first principles of belief, could not have been justly charged with the intention of promoting scepticism; his was the age of minute and astute disceptation, it is true, but it was also the epoch of the most firm, resolute and extensive faith. I have seen a dexterous fencing-master, after warning his pupil to hold his weapon fast, by a few turns of his wrist throw it suddenly on the ground and under his feet; but it cannot be pretended that he neglected to teach the art of self-defence, because he apparently

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deprived his scholar of that which is essential to the end proposed. To be disarmed is a step in the science of arms, and whoever has undergone it has already put his foot within the threshold ; so it is likewise with refutation.

In describing briefly the nature of Shelley's epistolary contention, the recollection of his youth, his zeal, his activity, and particularly of many individual peculiarities, may have tempted me to speak sometimes with a certain levity, notwithstanding the solemn importance of the topics respecting which they were frequently maintained. The impression that they were conducted on his part, or considered by him, with frivolity or any unseemly lightness, would, however, be most erroneous ; his whole frame of mind was grave, earnest and anxious, and his deportment was reverential, with an edification reaching beyond the age — an age wanting in reverence, an unlearned age, a young age, for the young lack learning. Hume permits no object of respect to remain ; Locke approaches the most awful specu-

lations with the same indifference as if he were about to handle the properties of triangles ; the small deference rendered to the most holy things by the able theologian Paley is not the least remarkable of his characteristics.

Wiser and better men displayed anciently, together with a more profound erudition, a superior and touching solemnity ; the meek seriousness of Shelley was redolent of those good old times before mankind had been despoiled of a main ingredient in the composition of happiness—a well-directed veneration.

Whether such disputations were decorous or profitable may be perhaps doubtful ; there can be no doubt, however, since the sweet gentleness of Shelley was easily and instantly swayed by the mild influences of friendly admonition, that, had even the least dignified of his elders suggested the propriety of pursuing his metaphysical inquiries with less ardour, his obedience would have been prompt and perfect.

Not only had all salutary studies been long neglected in Oxford at that time,

and all wholesome discipline was decayed, but the splendid endowments of the University were grossly abused. The resident authorities of the college were too often men of the lowest origin, of mean and sordid souls, destitute of every literary attainment, except that brief and narrow course of reading by which the first degree was attained : the vulgar sons of vulgar fathers, without liberality, and wanting the manners and the sympathies of gentlemen.

A total neglect of all learning, an unseemly turbulence, the most monstrous irregularities, open and habitual drunkenness, vice and violence, were tolerated or encouraged with the basest sycophancy, that the prospect of perpetual licentiousness might fill the colleges with young men of fortune ; whenever the rarely exercised power of coercion was extorted, it demonstrated the utter incapacity of our unworthy rulers by coarseness, ignorance and injustice.

If a few gentlemen were admitted to fellowships, they were always absent ; they were not persons of literary preten-

sions, or distinguished by scholarship, and they had no more share in the government of the college than the overgrown guardsmen, who, in long white gaiters, bravely protect the precious life of the sovereign against such assailants as the tenth Muse, our good friend Mrs Nicholson.

As the term was drawing to a close, and a great part of the books we were reading together still remained unfinished, we had agreed to increase our exertions, and to meet at an early hour.

It was a fine spring morning on Lady Day, in the year 1811, when I went to Shelley's rooms; he was absent, but before I had collected our books he rushed in. He was terribly agitated. I anxiously inquired what had happened.

"I am expelled," he said, as soon as he had recovered himself a little. "I am expelled! I was sent for suddenly a few minutes ago; I went to the common room, where I found our master and two or three of the fellows. The master produced a copy of the little syllabus, and asked me if I were the author of it. He

spoke in a rude, abrupt and insolent tone. I begged to be informed for what purpose he put the question. No answer was given; but the master loudly and angrily repeated, 'Are you the author of this book?' 'If I can judge from your manner,' I said, 'you are resolved to punish me if I should acknowledge that it is my work. If you can prove that it is, produce your evidence; it is neither just nor lawful to interrogate me in such a case and for such a purpose. Such proceedings would become a court of inquisitors, but not free men in a free country.' 'Do you choose to deny that this is your composition?' the master reiterated in the same rude and angry voice."

Shelley complained much of his violent and ungentlemanlike deportment, saying, "I have experienced tyranny and injustice before, and I well know what vulgar violence is; but I never met with such unworthy treatment. I told him calmly and firmly, that I was determined not to answer any questions respecting the publication on the table. He immediately repeated his demand. I persisted in my

refusal, and he said furiously, ‘Then you are expelled, and I desire you will quit the college early to-morrow morning at the latest.’ One of the fellows took up two papers and handed one of them to me; here it is.” He produced a regular sentence of expulsion, drawn up in due form, under the seal of the college.

Shelley was full of spirit and courage, frank and fearless; but he was likewise shy, unpresuming and eminently sensitive. I have been with him in many trying situations of his after-life, but I never saw him so deeply shocked and so cruelly agitated as on this occasion. A nice sense of honour shrinks from the most distant touch of disgrace, even from the insults of those men whose contumely can bring no shame. He sat on the sofa, repeating with convulsive vehemence the words “Expelled, expelled!” his head shaking with emotion, and his whole frame quivering. The atrocious injustice and its cruel consequences roused the indignation and moved the compassion of a friend who then stood by Shelley. He

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has given the following account of his interference :—

“So monstrous and so illegal did the outrage seem, that I held it to be impossible that any man, or any body of men, would dare to adhere to it ; but, whatever the issue might be, it was a duty to endeavour to the utmost to assist him. I at once stepped forward, therefore, as the advocate of Shelley : such an advocate, perhaps, with respect to judgment, as might be expected at the age of eighteen, but certainly not inferior to the most practised defenders in good will and devotion. I wrote a short note to the masters and fellows, in which, as far as I can remember a very hasty composition after a long interval, I briefly expressed my sorrow at the treatment my friend had experienced, and my hope that they would reconsider their sentence since, by the same course of proceeding, myself, or any other person, might be subjected to the same penalty, and to the imputation of equal guilt. The note was despatched ; the conclave was still sitting, and in an instant the porter came to summon me to

attend, bearing in his countenance a promise of the reception which I was about to find. The angry and troubled air of men assembled to commit injustice according to established forms was then new to me, but a native instinct told me, as soon as I had entered the room, that it was an affair of party ; that whatever could conciliate the favour of patrons was to be done without scruple, and whatever could tend to impede preferment was to be brushed away without remorse. The glowing master produced my poor note. I acknowledged it, and he forthwith put into my hand, not less abruptly, the little syllabus. ‘Did you write this?’ he asked, as fiercely as if I alone stood between him and the rich see of Durham. I attempted, submissively, to point out to him the extreme unfairness of the question, the injustice of punishing Shelley for refusing to answer it ; that if it were urged upon me I must offer the like refusal, as I had no doubt every man in college would, every gentleman, indeed, in the University, which, if such a course were adopted with all, and there

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could not be any reason why it should be used with one and not with the rest, would thus be stripped of every member. I soon perceived that arguments were thrown away upon a man possessing no more intellect or erudition, and far less renown, than that famous ram, since translated to the stars, through grasping whose tail less firmly than was expedient, the sister of Phryxus formerly found a watery grave, and gave her name to the broad Helle-spont.

“The other persons present took no part in the conversation ; they presumed not to speak, scarcely to breathe, but looked mute subserviency. The few resident fellows, indeed, were but so many incarnations of the spirit of the master, whatever that spirit might be. When I was silent, the master told me to retire, and to consider whether I was resolved to persist in my refusal. The proposal was fair enough. The next day or the next week, I might have given my final answer—a deliberate answer ; having in the meantime consulted with older and more experienced persons, as to

what course was best for myself and for others. I had scarcely passed the door, however, when I was recalled. The master again showed me the book, and hastily demanded whether I admitted or denied that I was the author of it. I answered that I was fully sensible of the many and great inconveniences of being dismissed with disgrace from the University, and I specified some of them, and expressed a humble hope that they would not impose such a mark of discredit upon me without any cause. I lamented that it was impossible either to admit or to deny the publication—no man of spirit could submit to do so—and that a sense of duty compelled me respectfully to refuse to answer the question which had been proposed. ‘Then you are expelled,’ said the master, angrily, in a loud, great voice. A formal sentence, duly signed and sealed, was instantly put into my hand: in what interval the instrument had been drawn up I cannot imagine. The alleged offence was contumacious refusal to disavow the imputed publication. My eye glanced over it, and observing

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the word *contumaciously*, I said calmly that I did not think that term was justified by my behaviour. Before I had concluded the remark, the master, lifting up the little syllabus, and then dashing it on the table and looking sternly at me, said, 'Am I to understand, sir, that you adopt the principles contained in this work?' or some such words; for like one red with the suffusion of college port and college ale, the intense heat of anger seemed to deprive him of the power of articulation, by reason of a rude provincial dialect and thickness of utterance, his speech being at all times indistinct. 'The last question is still more improper than the former,' I replied, for I felt that the imputation was an insult; 'and since, by your own act, you have renounced all authority over me, our communication is at an end.' 'I command you to quit my college to-morrow at an early hour.' I bowed and withdrew. I thank God I have never seen that man since; he is gone to his bed, and there let him sleep. Whilst he lived, he ate freely of the scholar's bread and drank from his cup,

and he was sustained, throughout the whole term of his existence, wholly and most nobly, by those sacred funds that were consecrated by our pious forefathers to the advancement of learning. If the vengeance of the all-patient and long-contemned gods can ever be roused, it will surely be by some such sacrilege ! The favour which he showed to scholars and his gratitude have been made manifest. If he were still alive, he would doubtless be as little desirous that his zeal should now be remembered as those bigots who had been most active in burning Archbishop Cranmer could have been to publish their officiousness during the reign of Elizabeth."

Busy rumour has ascribed, on what foundation I know not, since an active and searching inquiry has not hitherto been made, the infamy of having denounced Shelley to the pert, meddling tutor of a college of inferior note, a man of an insalubrious and inauspicious aspect. Any paltry fellow can whisper a secret accusation ; but a certain courage, as well as malignity, is required by him

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who undertakes to give evidence openly against another ; to provoke thereby the displeasure of the accused, of his family and friends, and to submit his own veracity and his motives to public scrutiny. Hence the illegal and inquisitorial mode of proceeding by interrogation, instead of the lawful and recognised course by the production of witnesses. The disposal of ecclesiastical preferment has long been so reprehensible, the practice of desecrating institutions that every good man desires to esteem most holy is so inveterate, that it is needless to add that the secret accuser was rapidly enriched with the most splendid benefices, and finally became a dignitary of the Church. The modest prelate did not seek publicity in the charitable and dignified act of deserving ; it is not probable, therefore, that he is anxious at present to invite an examination of the precise nature of his deserts.

The next morning at eight o'clock Shelley and his friend set out together for London on the top of a coach ; and with his final departure from the Univer-

sity these reminiscences of his life at Oxford terminate. The narrative of the injurious effects of this cruel, precipitate, unjust and illegal expulsion upon the entire course of his subsequent life would not be wanting in interest or instruction, when the scene was changed from the quiet seclusion of academic groves and gardens, and the calm valley of our silvery Isis, to the stormy ocean of that vast and shoreless world, to the utmost violence of which he was, at an early age, suddenly and unnaturally abandoned.

THE END

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